

The Golden Phoenix

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The Golden Phoenix

by [emiartse](#)

Summary

In his dreams, there had always been a voice. A soft melodic voice that sang their mother's lullaby. A more monotonous, but just as loving voice that promised he'd teach him to fight one day, once he was old enough of course. The doting voice of a mother laughs with a toddler as she gently tries to fix a small crown onto the boy's brow. And then there was the gentle voice of a father, that promised to always keep him safe from those who'd do them harm.

And in the morning when the boy would awake, he'd wonder who exactly he needed to be protected from.

"Tommy?" A voice called out from the doorway and Tommy grinned gleefully at the sight of his older brother.

"Dream!" He yelled, stumbling out of bed and into his arms, hugging the man tight. His brother returned the hug in kind, his hands pressing warmly into the spot on his back where his wings would ignite from for the first time in a few days, fully grown.

Surely Dream was all the protection Tommy would ever need in this world, right?

A knot of doubt coiled tightly in his chest.

AKA The DSMP Tangled AU nobody asked for.

Notes

fair warning, i like world-building, so itll be a chapter or two before we get to the main plot. but I promise it'll be interesting world-building. just gotta get some backstory established lol

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The Angel of Death

Chapter Notes

Word Count: 4.1k

TW: Blood and Gore (and in art)

In the beginning, the earth was dark. The lands were swallowed by the endless nights and monsters roamed freely to kill and ravage any spark of life. There was no hope, no love, only death, and destruction.

And from all that death and all that destruction two gods, were given life by their creators. The first was neither a man nor a monster, only an entity that craved destruction and blood but also sought balance and equality. He sought for a world without rulers, He sought for a world where monsters and the lifeforms they had been snuffing out for millennia could coexist. Perhaps not in harmony but in equal standing with another so the fight could be fair.

And so the world's first anarchist was born, The Blood God. And from his shadows, a sister, a twin bloomed from him. Her hair was dark as the age-old night and with eyes red as the blood her brother spilled at her feet. Her name was Death. The Goddess of Death.

While her brother roused the humans from their caves and hastily built shacks, she quickly got to work evening out the playing field. Day in day out, as the higher gods worked to bring the sun into existence she slaughtered every monster and beast that dared step near her. However, even given her immense power, she alone was not enough to cut down millions of mobs without her brother, who at the time was already waging his first war.

So she asked the high gods, "Please, send me a helper, an angel to stand by my side and fight with me."

The gods obliged.

Death watched as he floated down gracefully from the sky, swooping over her head and performing flips and spins with his newly created wings. The raven-haired goddess watched with a gentle smile

as her angel sought to impress her with his newborn eagerness. Eventually, she held out her hands and waited patiently for the man to land. Death took the time to notice exactly what type of wings their creators had made for him. Crow wings. Dark as the night that had encrusted over the planet for so long, and befitting to work alongside someone like her due to their stigma as a species.

Reputation aside, Death thought her angel was beautiful. His hair shone a golden halo of blond and his eyes were as blue as the newly lit sky. Though it appeared the angel thought her to be much more lovely. With flushed cheeks, the man tipped his striped hat at her and spoke passionately, "My Goddess, I am the most honored to be at your side. My life is yours."

"Did they give you a name, my angel?" Death asked gently placing the tip of her nail under his chin to lift his head up. His blue eyes peered into hers and for the first time in her short life, she saw no fear in the eyes of man. Of this man. Her angel.

"Philza, my goddess."

"Well, I must say, Philza. That's a much better name than the one I was given." Death chuckled, gently tipping his hat. Philza laughed, a bit nervously, with her, in awe that her laugh was just as exquisite as the rest of her. He fixed his hat and stood as tall as he could in the palm of her hand.

"My goddess, you deserve to have a name befitting of your wonder. Why do you not change it?" Philza asked. Death paused at that. Never once in her life did she think that even a possibility, and yet this man. Philza. Not ten minutes old was already showing her ideas she never dared dream of.

"I'm quite embarrassed to say I never thought about it. I'm afraid I wouldn't know what to pick. Do you have any suggestions?"

Philza went beet red and Death had to contain herself from laughing at his rather cute expression. He quickly composed himself and then stammered, "Y-You want me to...? *Me?!'*"

"Who else would I ask? You're my first and only friend. My brother is more preoccupied with wreaking havoc and spilling blood to pay attention to me."

"Then he is a fool to do so, pardon me if I am being too blunt. Any being, god or not would have to be brain-dead to not pay attention to you." Philza said passionately, and this time Death was the one

blushing.

“You’re a kind man, Phil. And I can already tell that we will get along quite well. Now, any thoughts on a name? Death doesn’t quite roll off the tongue, you know?”

The angel stayed silent for a long time, deep in thought, for this was the most important answer of his newfound life. The goddess waited patiently for Philza to respond and finally, he did,

“How about...Kristin?” The angel said sheepishly and the goddess felt her heart soar for the first time.

“Yes. Yes, I think Kristin will do quite nicely. But for my sake and yours, only you can call me that for now.”

“Yes, my goddess.”

Death raised an eyebrow at him and Philza once again went red in the face, “Yes...Kristin.”

She smiled the second time in her life, unbeknownst to either of them, this would be the second of millions of times Philza would make her smile.

Together the two fought fiercely at one another’s side for hundreds of years until the people grew strong enough to fight with them. And while normal humans were unable to see the Goddess of Death, they could see Phil. The humans proclaimed the angel as their leader and after many great and glorious battles that spanned over many generations, they made it to the End.

However, instead of bringing his entire army into the dangers of the End, he proclaimed that he would go alone. Philza promised that once the dragon had been slain there would be a new era of peace and with it a new generation of people. And while the people that Philza and Kristin cared for so dearly could not understand what the last part of his statement meant they wished him with tearful expression an honorable fight and for triumphant victory.

As he headed climbed the staircase to overlook the portal, he turned to his people, suddenly filled with a sense of dread that told him he would not be back for a while. A boy, no older than fifteen looked at him with sad eyes. *He's too young. Too young to be here.*

“I promise all of you, that one day I will return to this land and lead it into a golden age of peace. For now, take care of one another, live your lives, and band together. But be kind to those who are different from you, after all just because someone looks to be a monster doesn't mean that they are one.”

Phil reached the top step and with arms outstretched he fell into the portal. Time seemed to freeze as he freefalls into the End. His body grows cold quickly and ice forms against his wings, making flight impossible. His teeth chatter sending out puffs of cold air into the black abyss. But while his body freezes his mind races.

He feels time break apart and with that, he begins to see shapes and colors radiate around him. He begins to see people, happily chattering amongst themselves, the sun shines high in the sky and their world appears to be at peace. In the background, Philza can see a magnificent castle built atop the side of a large mountain. At the very top, the angel spots patches of freshly fallen snow upon the ground.

At the base of the mountain, is a kingdom, a town bustling with daily life. Children dance in the town square and Phil faintly can hear the angry shouting of a baker who appears to have burnt his hand against the hot oven.

The fantasy shifts and a blurry image appears before him.

A portrait, hanging in a large hall filled with tall windows that let in the golden sunlight.

Philza turned to look at the portrait and can partially make out a golden-haired man with a crown atop his head. His large dark wings are extended outwards and lightly wrap around the shoulders of two children. One of the boys appears to have long pink hair while the other has curly brown hair with pink roots barely peaking out. A crown rests atop both of their heads. Suddenly, Philza catches another figure in the painting. Sitting in the arms of the king is a small infant, maybe six or seven months old. His hair is a golden blonde, just like his.

What. What is this?

And then his feet hit the ground. And time starts once more.

“Philza. Phil, can you hear me?” He hears *her* whispering to him as he swims back to consciousness. His eyes open immediately at the sound of her voice and he sits up prematurely.

Black spots form precariously in his vision and Phil almost immediately falls back down his head swimming. She laughs apologetically and gently helps him to his feet.

As his vision clears he takes in the sight of his goddess. It appeared that she had shrunk down to her human form, a form she would rarely take due to the strain it put on her powers. Her long black hair flowed down to her knees. Entwined into her curly locks were several black roses with purple tips. Two braids with purple ribbons entwined in them wrapped around her head creating the appearance of a crown. She wore a long black dress with flowing sleeves. The dress was shoulderless but there was a shimmering mesh that trailed up to her golden necklace. It was accentuated by gold and on the bodice of the dress, a golden heart was embroidered in the center. Philza felt his own heart stutter in his chest, she looked *magnificent*.

Kristin beamed at him, her hands clasped together in excitement, “Did you see, my angel? Did you see them?”

Philza picks up his hat from the ground and nods, “I saw... a portrait in a large hall. It was me, I think. And there were three boys in the painting with me.”

Kristin nodded excitedly, her hands fluttering as she spoke, “The gods showed you a glimpse of the future. Your future. *Our future*. You have proven to them that you are worthy just by entering this portal and they have decided to bless you.”

Philza’s head spun with confusion, “They want... They want me? To be a father? I-... My goddess, my life is yours and yours alone. I have made my vow to stay at your side for as long as you’ll have me. These children... can’t possibly be mine. I would never... I could never lo...” The man bit his tongue quickly as his sentence cut off. He can already tell his face is a vibrant shade of red. Gentle cold hands come to rest against his cheeks and the goddess spoke softly,

“My love, I know you would never betray me that way. These children, they will be ours. Perhaps not in the traditional *way* but they will still be *ours*. “

Philza looks at his goddess with all the love in this world, “I have no idea what you mean by that.”

Kristin threw her head back and laughed and Phil found himself chuckling too. She pressed a gentle kiss against his cheek and said, “It doesn’t make sense now, but it will in due time. Once you defeat the dragon, everything will be different from the world you once knew. Make me proud Phil, defeat the beast and free this world.”

And with that, his goddess faded from view.

Philza sat there in silence for a long moment. *Everything will be different*. The man smiled as he fixed his hat securely onto his golden hair, he readied himself checking over his equipment one last time, and headed out to face the beast.

Do they think themselves above us?

Are we merely ants waiting to be quashed under their boot. Maybe they think us beneath them while they fly so high in the sky.

Send me out, master. I will destroy them all.

It is too early, boy. We must be patient. The Angel is slaying our guardian as we speak, an unspeakable tragedy no doubt.

I could do it, XD. I could kill him right now. Lend me the dreamons and I’ll make quick work of it.

Be patient, child. HD’s reincarnate is not ready yet and you are far too eager.

What must I do, master?

We must wait our turn for destruction. For in one thousand years when the golden phoenix enters our world.

And then, once the boy has matured enough, then the war will begin.

And what of the boy? What should become of him?

Break his body and bring me his wings. If you can do that, then I will make you a god among gods.

Once you have that power, nothing will stand in your way.

:)

It was one hell of a fight. The angry guardian of the End definitely had lived up to its legacy. But as Phil fought to whittle the last of the dragon's health down to naught, the beast cried out.

"Mercy, angel. Grant thee mercy!"

The arrow tightly strung in his bow and aimed with deadly precision towards the dragon's heart loosened and Philza tilted his head with confusion. He watched as the beast wobbled unbalanced in the sky before finally nosediving uncontrollably towards the ground. He let out a yelp and barely managed to fly up in time to dodge it. The dragon plowed into the ground, making its final resting place in the endstone.

Phil pivoted in the air and landed beside the dragon. He was careful to maintain his distance, as he stalked up the side of the dragon and took note of just how much damage he'd inflicted on the

beast.

“You ask for mercy, yet you struck first? Give me a reason not to cut you down where you rest.” Philza demanded and drew his katana, pointing the blade at the dragon’s neck.

The dragon hissed, “I know my life nears its end, fool. I’m not begging for my own life.”

“Then for whom do you plead mercy for?” Philza asked quizzically.

The dragon’s right-wing lifted with great exertion and beneath the black scales and torn skin, Philza saw something small shimmering in one of the beast’s claws.

He peered closer and waited for the beast to open her paw. In it, he found a large egg that glowed purple and had a shell hard as obsidian.

“Will this angel not hear out a mother’s final request?” said the Enderdragon, a lilt of irony to her dying voice.

Shame and guilt burned deep inside Phil’s chest and the man sank to his knees holding the egg in his hands like it would crumble to dust at any moment.

“Why did you not say anything? Why did you not stop the fight?” Philza cried, his sword clattering to the ground.

“The time has come for the End to be free, and the prince of this world with it.” The mother’s eyes fluttered drowsily and her breathing became shallow, “Do not look so worried, Angel. My son will not hatch for a very long time. You do not need to concern yourself with watching over him. Just make sure my child makes it to the Overworld.”

“You want me to let loose a dragon into the Overworld?” Philza asked, raising a brow.

“He is only half-dragon.” Philza chose to ignore the implications of that statement. The dragon continued, “He will not be a threat to you.”

Philza nodded in understanding and gently placed the egg into his satchel.

“Now go. It won’t be long before I draw my final breath and the portal is opened. I ask of you one more thing, Angel.”

Philza quirked his head in an almost birdlike motion, “What is it?”

“Once the portal is opened and you have made it through. Keep the portal guarded and prevent those who are unworthy from entering. Though a few of my people wish to leave the End, most would rather stay here. But without me, this place will be left unguarded and defenseless. All I ask is that you is that you become our new defender.”

Philza tilted his hat towards the dragon and swore, “I promise you. I’ll protect this land and its inhabitants. I’ll guard the stronghold from now until my dying day.”

The Enderdragon let out a pleased hum and her eyes fluttered shut for the last time.

A loud gong-like sound echoed across the End and the Overworld alike, signaling to every creature, mob, and higher being of Philza’s deed. All the enderman around him lowered their eyes in respect and as he turned around he saw that the portal had been opened.

Eager to get back to Kristin, Philza tipped his hat to the Enderman and rushed to the portal. He looked down into the void-like abyss and he felt the egg in his satchel shutter.

“You and me both, kid.” And with that, he took a brave step forward and fell into nothingness.

And just like last time, his vision clouded over with bright colors and he was once again given a glimpse into his future.

He's back inside the hallway of windows again, but this time only moonlight shone through its expensive and intricate panes. He stood by one of the windows and caught his own reflection.

It was him, definitely. But Philza appeared older, his youth not entirely faded but it was clear many years had passed. He had a small beard and small wrinkles appeared when he crinkled his eyes. While his physique was mostly unchanged, he appeared wiser and more mature.

How strange given the fact that I'm almost four hundred years old and don't look a day past twenty. And yet I look almost thirty here.

"Papa?" A small voice from the other side of the hall pulled his eyes away from his own reflection. A shuttered gasp left him and tears welled up in his eyes.

His heart softened at the sight of what had to be one of his and Kristin's sons.

A boy, no older than four with a stuffed bear clenched in his fist clumsily ran his way up to the angel, arms outstretched. The child bunched a piece of his cloak in his fist and tugged on the fabric.

Golden blond curls and blue eyes that mirrored his own peered up at him for a moment before the toddler buried his face into Phil's side.

The infant from the portrait. The youngest.

He bent down and scooped his son up into his arms. Phil stared at him for a long moment making sure to memorize each and every detail of the child's face down to the faint freckles that dusted his nose. He knew that Kristin would want to hear all about him later.

"What's the matter, mate? It's late, you should be asleep." Phil asked, feeling a bit awkward that he didn't know the name of his own son.

“I had a bad dream, Papa.” The toddler cried and hid his face into the crook of his shoulder. He felt dampness against his cloak from the spot the boy had his face buried into. Phil's heart ached at the sight.

“Do you want to tell me about it?” asked the angel, slowly beginning to walk down the dark hall that the child had emerged from.

His unruly curls fell into his eyes as the little prince nodded, “There was a scary man with smile... and he said he was going to take my wings. I told him my wings aren't grown in yet and...he smiled wider and said, ”Don't worry. I'll keep you locked up until they do.“

Phil's heart dropped and he hugged the child tightly to his chest, rubbing his back gently as the toddler cried into his shirt.

“Don't worry, my son. I'll never let anyone take you from me.” Philza swore. The boy lifted his head and his bottom lip trembled as he whimpered, “But what if he gets me anyway? What if you can't stop him?”

“Even if that somehow happened...I'd never stop looking for you. I'd tear this world to shreds until I found you. And I know your brothers would never stop looking for you either.”

His youngest son nodded and let his head rest back against his shoulder. They walked down the fancy-looking hallway for what felt like hours until he eventually, he came across a door that was half-open.

Peering inside to what looked like a large nursery he saw three beds, two sat on the left side of the room while a smaller bed with guard rails was pressed against the right wall. Looking at the bed closest to the locked balcony he saw two heads peeking out from under the covers, one was a boy with pink hair while the other had curly brown hair with outgrown roots.

The twins. His eldest sons. He set his youngest onto the floor and was about to enter when a hand on his shoulder caused him to spin around.

Philza's blood ran cold at the sight.



It was the youngest prince again, but now much older, maybe fifteen or sixteen. He couldn't see his face, it was like looking into a void where it was almost as if he could see his features but they were blurred and nonsensical to him. Completely unrecognizable. Perhaps the vision was trying to hide what the boy might look like in the future. It was a thought that deeply frustrated and terrified Phil all at the same time. A stream of blood began trickling down his chin. Looking down at the floor he could see a long trail of blood that followed the path that he and the child version of his son had followed back to his room. As if he'd been walking just a few feet behind them the entire way back.

Philza gently grabbed his shoulders and looked around for where the bleed was coming from. His eyes widened in horror as he looked at the back of his scapula. And right where two wings might emerge were two deep and jagged gashes that went down to his spine. It looked as if someone had quite literally ripped the wings out of his child's back.

His stomach turned nauseously and he swallowed back bile.

"No no no no no...I can fix this. You'll be okay kid, I promise." He pulled back and his son's head lolled at the movement. His movements were sluggish and sloppy, clearly, he was delirious from the astounding amount of blood he'd lost already. It had already seeped through his shirt and had trailed all the way down to his feet.

He swayed for a moment before he looked up at him, his face still shadowed by darkness.

"Dad...you lied." The boy spoke and his knees buckled sending the two crashing to the ground. Philza pulled the boy's head into his lap and took off his cloak. He lifted up the teen's arms wrapped the fabric around his torso, tying it off with a tight knot in the front.

It did little to stop the bleeding, no matter how hard Phil tried to staunch the blood it, the puddle beneath the two kept growing.

"Help me! Somebody help me! Please!" Philza cried, his voice echoing uselessly down the dimly lit hall. He pressed a palm against his son's face as he leaned over him.

Phil looked down at the boy curled up on the floor whose face was white as a sheet and let out a wail. His son. *He didn't even know his name*, the thought made Philza want to scream. He was completely helpless, there was no way to save him. There was nothing he could do except watch the life drain away from a face he was unable to see.

“Dad...” The teen called out weakly and Phil looked up. The teen spoke urgently and one of his hands came up to feebly grab at Philza’s cloak.

“Mom says it’s time to wake up. Don’t let this become my future, okay? Don’t break your promise.”

Philza nodded his head with tears sliding down his cheeks and against the prince’s pale face. He gripped the boy’s hand tightly in his own, “It won’t. I promise. I’ll protect you. I’ll protect all three of you.”

“Theseus.” His voice was barely audible and his chest rattled as he struggled for air.

“What?”

He smiled as blood began to seep from his nose as well, “You named me, Theseus.”

Theseus wheezed out one final exhale before his chest fell still.

The One Where Phil Respectfully Simps for His Wife.

Chapter Notes

the world-building continues with even more of philza simping for his wife.

Word Count: 5.1k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Philza woke up sluggishly to the feeling of soft hands carding through his hair and the soothing sound of his goddess humming a familiar melody. He leans into the touch, allowing a few tears to fall from his cheeks as he gradually returns to consciousness.

Her hands are gentle as they wipe away stray tears and Philza opens his eyes to find a pair of shimmering violet eyes staring back at him, no longer the bright red they'd been when they'd last seen one another. Her eyes had dulled to a beautiful purple that matched the flowers in her hair. They stay like that for a long moment, locked in one another's gazes before finally Phil sits up and suddenly he can't hold back his tears any longer.

A sob tears from his chest as he leans forward, putting his head into his hands. Arms come to wrap around him from behind and he can feel her chin come to rest against his shoulder. Phil tilts his head back and to the side so that his temple is pressed into her hair.

It was Phil who broke the silence, still biting back tears that burned in his eyes, angry at being kept from falling, "Your eyes...they're violet..."

He heard her chuckle incredulously, a light musical sound that resembled wind chimes. It set the angel's heart soaring as it always did every time she'd let out the familiar unrestrained chuckle that only Phil ever got to hear from her.

"Yes, my angel. It's a bit hard to explain at the moment but I promise you I will once we've talked a bit. You've been asleep for a long time."

Philza sat up at that, wiping his eyes dry with his sleeve. He turned around to face her and finally got a good look at his surroundings. They were still in the stronghold, but not in the main portal

room. Instead, it appeared as if one of the many side rooms had been remodeled into a tomb of some sort. It was a large carved stone room lit up by several torches on the wall, there was a long green rug that trailed from his bedside to a giant pair of expertly carved spruce doors. Looking down, he noticed that they were sitting on a golden table, crafted to look like the world's most uncomfortable bed. A coffin of gold meant to hold his comatose body for many months, perhaps years, perhaps centuries.

H-How long have I been in this room?

There was no outward indication to give him any clues, the corners of the room were spotless and clear of cobwebs. There wasn't a speck of dirt in sight. The torches were fresh. Clearly, someone had been taking care of him as he slept.

But for how long?

Suddenly there were cold hands cupping his face, pulling his attention back. Kristin's words were gentle, "My love, don't panic. Everything is alright, you did your duty and the world is safe. The world has thrived and now it is finally time to lead your people into the Golden Age. But before I take on the role of the immortal Goddess and talk about your duty to your people, let us just be Kristin and Phil for a moment."

Philza was reeling from confusion, his head was spinning as he blinked up at her. Nothing was making any sense. How much time had passed? Where was he? What had changed? Were his sons alive yet? Did they need him? And Theseus. *Oh my god, Theseus. My son. **Our son.** She doesn't know!*

"I saw them. I saw our sons, Kristin." Phil blurted out, his chest tight. He slapped a hand to his mouth as another wave of grief flooded out. Kristin's hand came to tuck itself to the underside of his jaw and she nodded at the words, "I know. I saw. The High Gods gave me that vision to show to you. But let me assure you...Theseus's fate isn't set in stone, Phil. You can save him. And I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you will."

"Theseus hasn't even been brought into this world yet and I already know that there is nothing you wouldn't do for him. For him and for the twins." His goddess smiled and pressed a gentle kiss to his cheek.

“Do you know their names? The twins?” Philza’s head perked up as his face flushed. Kristin sighed and shook her head, shifting a bit on the table so her legs could cross beneath her. The sight of his goddess looking so...casual would’ve thrown most people off, but not him. Only he got to see her like this, with all her walls torn down and caution thrown to the wind. Only Phil knew the real Goddess of Death.

And goddammit if he wouldn’t burn the world to the ground just to see her smile.

“I don’t know just yet. The Gods haven’t given me any clues, only telling me I’ll know when I see them. They’ve always been so cryptic with me...it’s frustrating.” Kristin huffed, letting her chin rest against her closed fists, “But not with Theseus, he’s *different*. He won’t be brought into the world the same way the twins will be, I don’t think. There is going to be something special about him...but I haven’t a clue as to what it is.”

Philza let out a concerned hum and shifted so his feet were swung over the table. The action alone had him groaning as his bones cracked from disuse. He felt different than normal, weaker, more vulnerable. Phil’s eyes widened as he recalled a detail from his vision. *I had aged. I was older in that vision...which means...*

“I’m mortal, aren’t I? They finally made me mortal.” Phil echoed blankly. Kristin blinked up at him with a pained expression before nodding solemnly. She leaned herself against him, her head coming to rest against his shoulder.

“They didn’t want the mortals to be confused as to why their monarch wasn’t aging so they... yeah...” Kristin murmured and took Phil’s hand in her own.

Mortal. That means one day...I’ll die. The thought of dying should’ve terrified Phil to his very core. Knowing that one day his life would end and Kristin would be without him, should’ve brought him to his knees. He should be begging the gods to return his immortality. He should be.

But he didn’t. Because in truth, Phil had always had a suspicion that this would happen. It was only logical. It had been framed that from the very beginning that Phil was always meant to But the thought of being without the woman he loved, that’s what was killing him more than the knowledge that his life was on a timer now, ticking down to the day he finally meets his end.

“They’re separating us, aren’t they?” Phil whispered, desperately trying to keep his voice from shaking. Kristin’s hands came up to turn his face to hers and before he could even process what was

happening, her lips were pressed against his. Phil returned the kiss, with a gentleness that had Kristin falling in love with him a thousand times over.

It was over far too soon.

Phil pressed his forehead against hers and the two sat there in a tranquil silence for a long time. Eventually he pulled back and took her hands in his own. If he was going to lose her, then at least he could make sure they were together in a different way. He brought his hand up against her cheek and for the millionth time in his long life stared in awe of her. Finally he asked, "Marry me?"

Kristin stared at him blankly for a moment and for a horrible instant Phil was scared he'd overstepped. But then she gave him a smile so dazzling it took his breath away, "After all this time, you still manage to surprise me...I really was starting to believe you'd never ask."

Philza sputtered incoherently at that and Kristin burst into laughter at his reaction. After his ears had quit burning, Phil joined in. And for a time, it was just the two of them, blissfully in love without a care in the world. His stomach ached from laughing and Kristin was leaning heavily against his side, holding her own stomach with one hand and wiping tears from her eyes with the other.

Phil beat her to it. Using his own sleeve, he wiped away the remains and then giggled like a lovestruck teenager, "So is that a yes or are you just going to keep making fun of me?"

Kristin batted his hand playfully and answered gleefully, "Of course it's a yes, you silly bird. It's always been yes."

"I love you," Phil blurted out, his eyes shining and a unmovable grin glued to his face. "I suppose I always have...since the moment I saw you for the first time. I knew I could never be in love with anyone else. It was always you. And I don't care if I never see you again after today because when they bury me in the ground, your name will still be etched into my heart for all to see."

Kristin wrapped her arms around his shoulders and leaned into him, "This isn't goodbye, Phil. The gods have given me a way to still see you, to still see our sons once they arrive. Once a week, I will be given a day to walk around the earth as a human. I will be able to spend time with all of you. And even when those long days come where you can't see me, I'll always be with you. My love for you will never stray far."

Philza could've cried. He probably would have if a noise from outside the room hadn't startled the two. They waited for the door to open in heavy silence, but it never did. Eventually Kristin turned to Phil, "I'm sure you have many questions for me, so let me go ahead and get the big news out of the way."

The angel blinked at her nervously as she spoke, "You've been asleep for quite a long time. So long that outside that room, isn't just the stronghold anymore. After the gong rang out, the people built a castle around the stronghold, for you. To keep you safe from the enemies that still posed a threat. They've blocked off this room with guards that have been protecting you for generations. This place, has become of a kingdom of thousands of citizens who have been awaiting your awakening for a little under a thousand years."

Philza felt his heart drop like a stone. *A thousand years? I've been asleep for just under a thousand years?!* When Phil's jaw failed to move, Kristin continued, "I have also been guarding this tomb and the end portal for that long as well. The people know that I'm here and that's part of the reason no one has dared try to destroy what has been accomplished here. And while they've been waiting for their king to arrive, they've set up a parliament of some sorts to keep everything in order."

"I've been overseeing this order for quite sometime, so don't be surprised if they don't immediately cower in terror at the mention of me. They're used to my presence here."

Phil was still stuck on having been asleep for a thousand years. Finally Kristin rolled her eyes and stood up, taking Phil's hands in her own, "Come now, say something."

She pulled the man to his feet and his knees almost immediately buckled from one thousand years of disuse. Phil's knees hit the floor and he stared at his goddess in shock for a moment longer before he finally spoke, "You... You've been watching over me for that long?"

Kristin knelt to his side and kissed him once more, which to be fair only ended up scrambling the angel's brain even more. She gently tucked a stray piece of blonde hair behind his ear and spoke, "Of course I have. I love you. I wasn't going to let anything harm you, while you slept. And your people weren't going to let that happen either."

"This is all *so much*." Philza exhaled and shakily stood back up to his feet. He leaned heavily against the table as he tried to regain his balance, but his legs felt like jello as if he'd never walked on them before. His knees shook from exertion, clearly, some muscle atrophy had set in while he'd

been asleep. That, or this was just how all mortals felt when walking for the first time. It's not like he'd had any first-hand experience, at least not until now. Kristin noticed his struggle and wrapped an arm around his waist, leading him towards the door.

He hated how weak mortality felt. His wings ached as he stretched them out for the first time since jumping through the portal all those years ago. Looking back, he winced at the disheveled state of his wings, feathers had bunched up against one another, and many feathers looked just on the verge of falling off. They desperately needed to be preened.

Ah well, he'd have time later he supposed.

Looking forward, he eyed the giant spruce door ahead of him like it was a great foe, because in a weird way, it was. It was the barrier that divided him from his old life to his new. The moment he stepped through this door, he was no longer the Angel of Death. No longer the loyal protector of the Goddess of Death and the savior of the End.

The moment he stepped through the door. He was Emperor Philza of the Antarctic Empire. His wings puffed up in anxiety, but a gentle hand quickly began to rub circles into his upper back.

"I would be lying if I didn't say I wasn't scared shitless by all this." Philza said giving a weak laugh. His hand came to wrap around the handle of the door but before he could pull it, Kristin turned to him,

"There is no one better suited for this role, Phil. These are your people, you fought so hard to free them and now it's finally time to lead them. You're the Angel of Death, my love. Your wings are a mark from the gods that deems you worthy to rule what will become the greatest Empire this world has ever seen. I won't lie and say it will be easy, because it won't, but you are ready for this."

Phil looked at his Goddess one last time before opening the door and smiled, "An angel, ey? And here I thought my wings were more crow-like."

The Goddess giggled at her angel, and that was all the motivation Phil needed.

He opened the door.

Kristin was right. Ruling wasn't easy, but somehow Phil made it seem like a walk in the park, to the public at least. Anyone who actually knew him, knew how exhausted he was all time. Day in and day out there was always some new crisis that required Phil's attention, whether it was something minor like a rogue politician with a silver tongue that Phil had to wrangle under control to something huge like the outbreak of Avian Influenza that had wiped out 50% of the Avian winged during his second year of rule. That particular outbreak had nearly cost Phil his own life, but he pulled through. Many others weren't so lucky.

It was still hard for him to believe that three years had already flown by. The Empire had been overjoyed when Philza had finally returned to them, his wings had easily proven his birthright.

And so Philza had been crowned Emperor of the Antarctic Empire just two weeks into his reign, and shortly after, on the one month anniversary of his awakening, he and Kristin were married. Surprisingly, the kingdom was unconcerned about their Emperor marrying a goddess. Apparently, Kristen hadn't exaggerated when she said the people were used to her presence.

While the Empire started out with just the mainland kingdom below the castle built into the side of the great stronghold mountain, it soon began to look to expand. Instead of taking over countries entirely, Phil opted to form alliances with their rulers as long as they promised to lend their arms to the Emperor whenever needed and deemed themselves part of the Empire. The countries could still keep their governments and leaders as long as those rules were still followed.

Funnily enough, it seemed that most countries would rather not defy the wishes of the husband to the Goddess of Death. But Phil was a fair ruler and the pros of his contracts with these kingdoms far outweighed the cons, so there wasn't much argument anyway.

The Empire thrived and in just the first three years of Philza's reign, the size of the mainland kingdom, or L'manburg as Kristin had named it, had doubled in size. Every day from his palace, Phil could see new roads and homes being built as more and more people arrived, and his heart swelled with pride at what had been accomplished.

With the End having been freed nearly a millennia ago, the kingdom had become a diverse melting pot of all different kinds of people. Ranging from winged folk to non-winged folk, to hybrids, and to normal humans. But while many people in L'manburg were often born with wings, none of them could fly. Winged folk or Volants, as was the technical definition, were just so new on this planet,

for, after all, he'd been the only winged human or hybrid for nearly four hundred years before he fell asleep. Their genetic makeup still had some kinks to work out and most times, even when there was a dominant gene, volant wings still rarely formed. And even when they did, there was always some sort of flaw with the wings when they first formed or soon after and so Phil had yet to see anyone who could soar through the air the way he could.

For example, the castle's doctor, a demon from the Nether named Badboyhalo had bat-like wings, but unfortunately, when his wings had first formed, atrophy had already set in. Now his wings had many holes in them, and he had said on meeting him the day he'd awoken that he'd never once been able to use them.

It appeared to Phil that whenever he met someone who was winged like him, a similar reasoning was given. Such as their wings were either too small, torn upon formation, too stiff, or even some that were unbalanced in appearance and functionality.

It was unfortunate, and at times Philza felt truly alone because of it. The thought of never having someone to share the open sky with was a depressing thought, but one that his advisor Jsclatt always made sure to scoff at.

"Could you imagine the chaos, your majesty? Thousands upon thousands of L'manburgians airborne, the mere thought of it makes me uneasy." The ram-hybrid said gesturing wildly and Philza chuckled at his antics. The brunette gave him a snarky grin, and for a moment Philza could still how young he was. Just barely twenty and already the second most powerful man in L'Manburg, not that he was much older at least by physical standards. According to Bad, Phil had the appearance of a twenty-three-year-old.

His advisor cleared his throat and tossed a balled-up sheet of paper, most likely a scrapped draft to some legal document, through the air and nailed the Emperor right in the nose. Phil startled for a moment before turning to flip him off and Schlatt simply cackled loudly, in a mad sort of way that only Schlatt could pull off, at his expression.

It had taken some time for the two to become friends, at first they had rarely seen eye to eye, and sometimes it was still the case. Schlatt was as stubborn and ill-tempered as... *well...a ram.*

But Philza relied on Jsclatt's council over most anyone's. The man was simply-put *fucking brilliant*. He was a master at coercion and charisma, in ways Phil could never hope to be. Even though the man was the perfect politician, they both knew that Schlatt would've made for a shit ruler. He was cold towards those he didn't trust, he was impulsive and his actions were heavily

commandeered by his emotions. He thought that fear was the best way to rule, which was something Phil strongly opposed and often led to the majority of their arguments, that and Schlatt's newfound love for whiskey.

In a weird poetic way, they were the perfect team. What the other lacked, the other made up for. They balanced each other out and the Empire thrived because of it.

He trusted the man with his life, even though sometimes he wanted nothing more than to rip the sideburns off his face.

"Dear friend, you have to open your mind to it one of these days, being able to fly is like nothing else. The feeling of the wind against your face and having your wings propel you into the clouds is what heaven itself is like." Philza countered, elbowing the man in the side.

"Sounds like a good way to mess up my hair," Schlatt said, snorting as he ran his hand through his brown curls at the mention.

"Maybe it's not for everyone, I suppose," Phil admitted, and then handed Schlatt back the paperwork he'd signed. The two were sitting in his office in one of the far east wings of the castle, a common scene as the two often worked together into the long hours of the night. More often than not, they'd both end up being shaken away by the Captain who had made it a habit to peek inside the Emperor's study because *she just knew* she'd find the two slumped over their work. "The both of you are going to be hunchback by thirty I swear." She'd say, fighting to stomp out the fondness that crept into her tone.

"Your room is *literally* twenty feet away, your majesty."

Phil liked having his office close to his room, and close to the three empty bedrooms that also resided in this particular wing of the castle. Schlatt had always wondered why Phil never bothered to put furniture in them, usually stating that it made the Emperor's wing of the castle look rather plain.

But Philza would always smile and say, "*They'll be filled soon enough.*"

Suddenly a knock on the door jolted the two men from their thoughts. Philza hummed to himself for a moment, marking the page in the legislature he was reviewing with one of his feathers that had fallen out earlier. He then called out, "Come in."

The door opened and Philza's expression lit up like the sun at the sight of the Empress.

"Kristin." He called out breathlessly, jumping up from his seat. He rushed over to his wife and engulfed her in his arms, spinning her around for a moment before setting her back on the ground.

"You're early. I thought you wouldn't be here till Thursday?" Phil questioned, concern lilted in his voice. Schlatt let out a small cough, grabbing the attention of the two royals. He bowed to the two and said formally, "I'll take this as a sign to go finish the rest of this paperwork in my office, but your majesty?"

Philza turned his head back to the ram.

"I left the approval forms for the construction of the L'manburg Orphanage on top of the book on the architecture of End Cities."

"Ah yes, I'll get that to you later tonight, thank you, Schlatt. That'll be all." Phil pulled Kristin away from the door, allowing the ram to get by but not before Schlatt bowed once to the Empress and greeted, "Good to see you again, Empress."

"Good to see you again as well, Chancellor Jschlatt." Kristin greeted warmly, allowing Schlatt to kiss her hand.

"Keep him in line, while I'm gone, will you?" Schlatt joked, causing Phil to roll his eyes and yell, "Out!"

"I always do," Kristin said winking, causing Schlatt to cackle as he closed the door behind him.

"One of these days, I'm going to throw him out a window and he better hope he can fly," Philza muttered jokingly, turning back to his desk to grab the paperwork his advisor had mentioned. After

a moment or two of flipping through it, his wings puffed with nerves when he realized he hadn't heard Kristin laugh at his rather poor attempt at humor. He turned and found her looking down at the ground, wringing her hands in what seemed like anxiousness.

Phil set down the paperwork immediately and rushed to her side, taking her hands in his own, "My love? What's wrong?"

Kristin gave him a wobbly smile and the long dark green dress she wore swayed along with her as she pulled away and walked behind his desk. She flitted her delicate fingers along the vast volumes of books that were neatly organized on the bookshelf before settling on a thick red one of the Nether.

"Kristin?" Phil called, tilting his head in confusion. Kristin simply opened the book on his desk, flipping through the pages until she landed on a map of the charted portions of the Nether. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity she grabbed a pen from Phil's desk and circled what looked like a piglin village.

She looked back up at Phil and her eyes filled with tears, "*I found the twins.*"

Phil's eyes widened comedically and at first, a smile bright as the sun itself broke out on his face, before he finally realized that the tears in his wife's eyes were not ones of joy. He hurried beside her and pulled the goddess into his arms, letting her cry into his shoulder all while gently rubbing circles into her back.

"What is it, my darling? What's wrong?" Philza asked, his own eyes beginning to water as his own panic set in. *The twins. Are they in danger? Are they hurt? Do they need me, now?*

Kristin's face tilted to the side so she could speak against his chest, "When the gods told me about the twins and about Theseus all those years ago, they also granted me a gift of my own."

She took a shaky breath, his bottom lip trembling as she exhaled the words as if they were shards of glass, "Said '*gift*' would allow me the ability to revive two souls. They never specified who and never told me why. Just that I would be able to break my oath of death and bring life just this once. I just...*never* thought..." A wave of ice-cold terror washed over Philza as the realization set in like a ton of cement block crushing against his chest.

Oh Primes...No...

“The t-twins?” Philza cried out in horror. Kristin nodded, her face pale. She took a moment to steady the wobble in her voice before continuing, “Two brothers from the Nether. Half piglin, half-human. Something that is *highly* discriminated against in their race. Sometimes if the piglin features are prominent enough, the droves will allow the spawn to survive, but if they appear too human...”

Philza’s hand came to cover his mouth, stifling a sob, “At first they were allowed to stay in the drove, apparently the elders hoped that more piglin features might form, but once they turned five...they just let them starve to death and then just...*left them there inside the crate they’d been living in.*”

“I was tallying the dead yesterday when I saw them. They looked so *lost*. The one with longer hair had his arm around the other like he was trying to protect him from the other souls like he was afraid they'd attack them. And...*Phil...*” Kristin breathed out, her voice cracking as tears finally spilled over. There was nothing he could do except hold the woman he loved tight in arms, whispering soft reassurances to her. Finally, she pulled back and placed her hands on his shoulders,

“We have to go get them. They’re ours, Phil. They’re our sons.” Kristin’s face was wet with tears, which Phil was quick to wipe away with his sleeves, pressing a gentle kiss to her forehead.

And that was all the motivation Phil needed before he sprang into action. He grabbed his katana off the mantle and headed off with Kristin into his room, quickly changing out his normal royal attire of light blue to his familiar old green robes that still smelled of ash and blood. He placed the small gold circlet he wore usually as opposed to his bulky crown and fished out a rather overworn green and white striped hat.

To keep the piglins from attacking him (at least before he could attack them), he put on a gold chest plate over his yukata. As he was changing, Kristin was quickly packing him up food and blankets and any other supplies he might need for the trip.

Finally, once he was all packed and ready to leave he turned to his wife who spoke urgently, “I’ll stay here for now and cover for you while you're gone.” She reached into her pocket and hand him the map from the book, “This should be the village they’re at. The moment you find the boys, call for me and I’ll give you the power to save them. Once you've performed the ritual, I'll lead them to the gates, after that it's up to them to find their way back to their bodies, so it might be a few minutes before they wake.”

"And as for the village?" Kristin's face darkened at the mere mention. She wordlessly reached for the katana that was tucked into his sheath and handed it to him. "I leave their fate up to you, Philza. Though I'm sure you know my preference."

Phil nodded and pocketed the map and katana once more. He shifted his gear over his back and pressed a kiss against his wife's forehead. Kristin smiled with a sadness that threatened to tear Phil's heart to shreds. She leaned up and uttered softly in his ear, "Bring them home, Phil." Then using her magic, she opened a portal to the Nether in front of him.

"I will, I promise." And with that, he entered the vibrant purple gateway that led to Hell itself.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment if you enjoy! Next chapter we finally start to get into actual sleepy bois lol

The Twins

Chapter Notes

ok so this next chapter is basically being separated into three different chapters leading up to tommy.

i would apologize for it taking this long to get to the main plot but yknow

nah

have fun

TW: Child death. Starvation and the slight mention of corpse decomposition. Uh, also the absolute annihilation of a small town.

Word Count: 3.8k

Edit 03/11/25: Changed some of Wilbur's dialogue to be more childish.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It had always been Technoblade and Wilbur. From the beginning. From the *very* beginning. They'd shared a womb, after all, they were brothers. Twins. Inseparable from one another.

Even in death.

"This is unfair", Wilbur had told his brother once as the two were scavenging a nearby chest for a scrap of food, something. *Anything* that could possibly soothe their growling bellies. Barely five years old and the two had been left to fend for themselves since the day they were born.

Nobody wanted them after all. They were freaks. Outcasts. Too piglin to be human, and far too human to be piglin. Their pig-like ears and their bottom fangs were a dead giveaway of what kind of abomination they were, and yet those features had still somehow kept the brothers alive. Kept the drove from slaughtering the two in their sleep. Though it wasn't enough peace of mind to keep Techno from sleeping with one eye open.

To be honest, it was a miracle the two lasted as long as they did. But eventually, time had taken its toll on the two, and the lack of nutrition had left the boys emaciated and too weak to even pull themselves out of the empty food crate they'd been living in.

Eventually, even the most forgiving members of their clan began to turn their nose up at the two, no longer throwing them scraps of beef when nobody was looking. That was the day Techno finally broke down about it, crying himself into unconsciousness in Wilbur's arms until his dehydrated body could no longer form tears.

The only blessing of it all is that the two had died around the same time. Both of them were far too gone with delirium to notice when the other's grip had slackened a bit too much or when Wilbur's chest had finally stopped shaking with every ragged inhale.

No, that had been the only mercy. That Technoblade hadn't noticed when his twin had died in his arms, hadn't noticed when the person he cared for in the world had drawn a final pained inhale as the world faded to white.

He hadn't noticed the way the eyes that reflected his own hazed over. Oblivious to the way Wilbur's vacant gaze was fixed on him, unseeing but staring endlessly at him nonetheless.

Empty. Dead. *Gone*.

No, he hadn't noticed at all. For it wasn't fifteen minutes later that the piglin listlessly wheezed out a shallow breath before his own lungs finally stalled to a halt.

And there they remained. Two innocent souls who never even had a chance in life, lying dead and ignored by the world in one another's bony arms in the back corner of the alleyway that had been their only shelter for most of their short lives.

Most likely, the village wouldn't find the two for a few days, but eventually, the sweltering stench of decomposing flesh would raise some suspicion. Perhaps they would be found, but only for their lifeless corpses to be disposed into the river of lava that divided their drove from the infected undead corpses of their former brethren. After all no one would risk getting frostbite, even if the threat were two emaciated half-breeds. Overall, their disposal would be a minor inconvenience to the village that had indirectly deprived the twins of their lives.

And they would've continued on obliviously with their mundane lives if the village had not royally pissed off Death and her angel.

The Angel arrived at the Nether village, his dark wings raised high and his face shielded by his hat, an omen of death in broad lava light.

And an omen of death he proved to be.

What happened to the town next could only be described as a massacre to some, while a service to others. Phil would describe it as justice. Only once the screaming had finally stopped and the final Brute choked to death from his own blood at the Emperor's feet did Phil begin his hunt.

It was the grayest moment of Phil's life as he searched the now desolate town with the blood of so many staining his coat. He shuttered, he just wanted to find the boys, go home, and never look back. He would've burned the town to ash if it wasn't already fireproof.

The entire event reminded him of the reason he was called The Angel of Death in the first place.

There was a myth, normally told to small children in order to get them to behave. A folktale that had managed to travel to the far corners of both the Nether and the Overworld alike.

The story was quite simple really. It was something The Goddess's angel had proclaimed out in the midst of a terrible battle when his own men had been driven to madness by the Blood God's curse. In exchange for their minds, the Blood God offered strength and speed akin to gods, something that would surely turn the tide of the war against the still staggering amount of mobs.

And like fools, the men accepted. And when it came time to fight, the men turned on their own people, killing both friend and foe alike without the slightest hint of remorse.

Once the Angel had seen what the Blood God had done, he flew high into the sky and declared loudly, "To those that have treated me with injustice, that *use me*, that deceive my people and rob them blind of choice. Those that betray the Goddess you swore to fight for? I will repay that injustice a thousand times over."

True to his word, the angel did just that. Thousands upon thousands of souls cried out for the final time that night. And when the battle was over? They would later say the river water was

undrinkable for the next few weeks, stained red with blood that had been spilled the Angel's blade. And as punishment for the destruction he'd caused, the Blood God was banished to the deepest crevice of the Nether to rot for all eternity in frozen darkness.

Except, the Blood God didn't do that, using the last of his power, the god cursed the people of the Nether with the Frostbite. A virus that overtook the minds of any piglin who perished outside the Nether or were bitten by an infected. In rare cases though, the virus would overtake the corpses of those that were not properly burned.

As punishment for the Angel himself...well...the Blood God made sure his legacy would outlive him.

And as the bodies of two Nether children lay dead in a singed and battered food crate, The Blood God saw the man his foolish sister had trusted over him enter the dark alleyway of a town that had been reduced to nothing.

It was at that moment, that his legacy was sealed. His presence, weak and broken from years without sacrifices made in his honor crept up like a shadow to the surface world.

And as the golden-haired angel looked down at the dead children with a grief-stricken expression, the Blood God's curse coiled like a wire around the younger one of the twins. He waited impatiently for the virus to overcome the corpse of the toddler and for Philza's life to come to a violent halt, but unfortunately, he was unprepared for his sister's meddling.

Philza took the older twin with short, curly pink hair into his arms and cradled the lifeless child against his chest. He gently pushed a few strands of matted hair out of his face and pressed a tender kiss to his forehead.

"Wake up..." Philza whispered and then shifted the child into one arm so he could gently lift up the long-haired twin into his other arm. He pressed the same kiss against the boy's brow and The Blood God screeched in rage once he realized what was happening. His grip failed and he once again was sent plummeting back down to his cage.

Phil gently set the two children side-by-side onto the soul-sand pavement and knelt down in front of them, waiting for Kristin to escort the twins' souls to the gates of the Afterworld so that they could find their way back to their bodies.

His leg bounced nervously as the minutes ticked by painfully slow. He looked down at the twins in front of him, just barely out of toddlerhood and already they had experienced more pain than most people experience in their entire lifetime.

They were so *tiny*. Just little bundles of skin and bones with tufts of pink hair and long ears.

These kids weren't even old enough to know how to read and already their innocence had been taken. Their lives were snuffed out like an ant underneath an absentminded trader's boot.

Phil felt something damp slide down his cheeks and he realized he was crying. He didn't bother to wipe them away. His heart was *aching* for the two boys in front of him.

"It's not fair. You didn't deserve this. I'm so sorry I wasn't here sooner." The emperor cried, curling his arms around himself and his eyes shut tightly. His shoulders shook violently as he poured his heart out on the sweltering ground.

It was just like with Theseus. Once again, he'd failed to help those he was supposed to protect. *His sons*. And yeah, they weren't his yet and he didn't know them. But he still cared for them, as much as one could for strangers.

He looked again at the two boys in front of him, studying their faces as his sobs receded. The first of the two boys had thick unkempt pink curls that fell over his eyes. The only thing keeping his hair in some semblance of order was a threadbare red beanie that looked like it was close to falling apart entirely. He was dressed in an equally ragged-looking yellow sweatshirt that seemed to swallow the boy entirely.

The other brother had what Phil would normally assume to be long, straight equally pink hair that just passed his shoulders. It was clumsily tied back with string and was knotted to hell. He was also, much to Phil's horror, much smaller than his brother. His eyes were sunken in from malnourishment. Philza also took in the sight of a deep laceration that trailed over the bridge of his nose, it looked recent and by the looks of it, *infected*.

Rage boiled in his gut and for a brief moment, he wished he hadn't already slaughtered the village...just so he could do it again. Philza inhaled deeply, he would need to bury that immoral side of him as soon as possible.

He leaned down to brush the hair out of one of the boy's faces, noting both boys now possessed a small streak of white in their hair that had not been there earlier. But before he could even touch him, the child sucked in a lungful of air that sounded more painful than anything. Not two seconds later, the other boy (the one with the curly hair) inhaled as well, letting out a sickly wheeze afterward. Phil scampered back, not wanting to immediately startle the boys as they came to.

The longer-haired child was the first to move, his arm swinging over to grab at his brother. His fingers dug into his shoulder, clutching at the yellow sweatshirt. His eyes were shining a bright and startling red as he whimpered out, "Wilbur?"

"I'm here." The boy let out a pained moan as he rolled to the side to face him, his own red eyes shining back at him, "It hurts, Techno. My chest hurts..." Techno clutched his hand tightly in his own for a moment before suddenly snapping his head upwards.

"What is that sound? Do you hear it?" Techno winced, clutching weakly at his skull. He tried to sit up and as he did. That was when he finally locked eyes with Philza who was perched, much like a bird would be on a nearby trashcan.

The child inhaled sharply, *fearful*, and grabbed Wilbur by the back of his shirt before attempting to scramble to his feet. His knees buckled almost immediately from weakness and he just about crashed to the ground. The boy narrowly avoids slamming his head against a nearby dumpster thanks to Phil who is able to catch him by the crook of his bony elbow.

Before Techno can even process what was happening he'd already been deposited back onto the ground next to his brother with a gentleness the child had never experienced before. The winged man raised his hands in surrender and took a cautious step back.

"I'm not here to harm you, I promise." The man said with a soft voice, stepping back even further to show he wasn't a threat. "I'm here to help you."

"Get away! Stay back!" Techno hissed, baring his teeth at the man. He tried pulling himself up again and managed to balance himself into a wobbly stance that threatened to collapse at any moment. Suddenly his twin turn to his side, crying out as he began coughing and wheezing violently against the ground. His tiny frame shook with each ragged inhale.

Philza rushed over to his side, much to Techno's dismay who responded by trying to angrily shove him away, only to lose his balance altogether. The pink-haired boy fell involuntarily against him and Phil caught him easily with his free arm. Techno's head lolled backward as a heavy wave of fatigue washed over him.

They were still so weak and frail from hunger and dehydration, even after being revived.

The child let out a frightened whimper as he tried to push away. (Heartbreakingly enough, Phil wasn't holding him down or anything. The boy simply lacked the strength to pull himself up anymore.) Finally, after a few attempts to stand again, he collapsed into his arms and whispered so softly Phil nearly missed it, "Please...don't hurt us. Please be a good guy." His voice sounded so defeated and so...*tiny*.

Techno looked up at him, his red eyes pleading, "Help us. Please..." He turned his gaze downward to where Wilbur was curled up on the sand, eyes shut tightly in pain. The curly-haired child peered up at Phil with lidded red eyes that mirrored his brother's. Philza turned back to Techno who finally allowed the tears he'd accumulated to spill over and slide down his soot-covered cheeks, "Please... save my brother. He's all I have. Just...please don't be like...*them*."

Philza's heart ached at the plea and it takes all of his strength not to let a few tears of his own spill. He gently presses his hand to the side of Techno's face and wipes away the fear in his eyes with a simple swipe of his thumb. Techno let out a shuttered sob and leaned into the touch cautiously, his eyes wide with an emotion Philza simply couldn't describe with just one word. It bordered on bafflement, amazement, desperation, and sadness all at once.

As if the small boy lying fragile and broken in his arms had never experienced what positive touch was. Philza was almost certain the only affection he'd ever received was from his brother. Finally, Philza gave the child a melancholic smile and said,

"I promise you, they will *never* hurt you again. If you'll allow me to, I can take you back to my home where my wife and I will help both you and your brother. We can provide both of you with a proper home, food, and education. *We can keep you safe.*"

Techno stared back at him with an incredulous expression, his mouth hanging open lacking the words to say to the man who was offering them everything they'd ever wanted.

It was Wilbur who spoke first, his voice wrought with disbelief, “Why? Why help? You don’t know us.”

Because the gods prophesized it and my life is not my own to live. The thought echoed harshly in his brain and anger burned at him once more. *No. This is my choice. I’m helping them because I want to, not because I was instructed to do so. This is one decision that I won’t allow to be decided for me.*

“Because...” Phil began and hoisted Techno up into one arm as he stood. He knelt down by Wilbur and stretched out a hand to the child, “Everyone deserves to be given the chance to live.”

Wilbur stared at his hand intensely, his expression unreadable. He looked back up at Phil and his red eyes met blue. Philza felt like his soul was being read by the scrawny five-year-old, as if every wrong Phil had ever committed was being laid bare before him, ready for judgment.

The eyes that stared back at him were critical, more calculating than that of his brother, who had been so quick to trust. (although his weak status could’ve easily affected his judgment). Philza could tell, however, that Wilbur was someone who craved knowledge or at least craved the ability to understand people and how their minds worked. He craved to know what his enemies were thinking.

Slow to earn trust and even slower to earn love, Wilbur was someone who’d clearly been hurt by the world and his faith in people had been shattered because of it.

Phil knew it would be a quite awhile before he obtained any semblance of trust from the curly-haired boy. And as if Wilbur could tell what Phil was thinking he spoke, “I don’t trust you, but then again I don’t think we have much of a choice do we?”

After a long moment, Wilbur sucks in a ragged breath, one that caused him to break down into a small fit of violent coughing. He raised a hand when Phil reached for him, keeping him away, finally after a long moment they subsided and he turned back to the man. His resistance crumbled when he looked at his twin who was on the verge of unconsciousness. Phil’s eyes softened when Wilbur set his tiny hand into his own and nodded.

The angel bent over and wrapped his free arm securely around the child, lifting him into his arms. Techno perked up in his hold when he noticed his twin at his side, he weakly grabbed his brother’s hand in his own before exhaustion took over once again and he drifted off.

It's not long before both boys are curled up in his arms, completely out of it. The only reason they'd probably had been able to wake up at all was due solely to adrenaline, now that it had worn off and the twins knew they were at least somewhat safe, Phil guessed it would be a while till they woke up on their own.

Phil looked down at the two pink-haired boys curled up in his arms and something new and unfamiliar swelled in his chest. Perhaps it was that feeling Badboyhalo had described to him when he'd first held his son, Sapnap in his arms. The overwhelming feeling to protect the two boys who'd placed their lives into his hands, knowing they had no other choice. Not quite love, but paternal in nature nonetheless.

Sadness swelled in his chest. He swore to himself he'd earn their trust. That he'd spend the rest of his mortal life working to earn their love, and perhaps even longer. After all, "I am immortal until proven not." Philza mumbled to himself as he made his way back to the portal. He trod carefully through the town, taking care to avoid the piles of bodies located on the far side of the town.

Gods knew the last thing he'd want was for the twins to see such a horrific sight.

Wilbur stirred quietly in his arms, "It's so quiet. It's never quiet here."

Philza smiled at the boy, "They're scared of me, and rightfully so. They've all scurried into their homes like cowardly rats."

"You must really strong for them to be scared of a human," Wilbur murmured into his shoulder as they crossed over a narrow pathway Philza had made over a lake of lava. They grew close to the portal and the curly-haired child tensed in his arms when he spotted the glowing portal that led to a world neither twin had ever dared dream to see.

"What's it like? The overworld?" Wilbur asked, his head perked up and his red eyes reflected the violet-purple that emanated from the portal.

"It's different. Some would say better than your world. Though in my opinion, the people are all the same. Though the climate is much more favorable."

Wil deflated in his arms and sadness echoed in his bright eyes. Phil frowned and quickly added, “Do not fret, little one. I’ve promised to protect you and your brother and I meant that.”

“I’m not a ‘little one’ my name is Wilbur.” The child snarled in his grasp and Phil had to hold back a laugh, “Apologies Wilbur, but to my people, you are quite small.”

“I am five! I may be a child but I’m not a baby!” Wilbur hissed, before descending into yet another fit of coughs. Phil paused, just before the portal and waited for Wilbur to still once more.

“That doesn’t sound too good, mate. When we get back to my home you and your brother will have to be looked at, it may seem a bit overwhelming at first but I promise my people won’t harm you.” Philza swore. He stood mere feet from the portal and Wilbur stiffened, “No, you promised!”

“Wil-”

“No! Nobody else! Only you! They’ll hurt us. I can’t...I can’t let them hurt Techno...please...” Wilbur pleaded, his small hands digging into his shirt.

“Philza. My name is Philza.”

“Philza,” The name rolled clumsily off his tongue, “Please Philza, no one else. I don’t want more strangers!”

Phil sighed, wishing he had a hand free to brush the faded pink hair out of his face, “Shh..shh...it’s okay, Wilbur. It’ll just be one more person, well maybe two if Puffy shows up, but I promise she’s trustworthy. She has a kid of her own too, a boy just a little older than you and Techno. The only other person I’ll allow will be a doctor who can properly care for your lungs and then my wife.”

Wilbur frowned but didn’t complain further, instead choosing to bury his face into Phil’s shoulder, his breath coming out in wheezes. Phil took this as an opportunity to get out of the Nether at last.

“Hold your breath, Wilbur. It’s time to go home.”

Wilbur obliged, letting his eyes shut and sucked in a shallow breath.

And with that Phil stepped through the portal.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter should be out tomorrow?? It's all written out it's just going to take me a bit to edit.

also don't @ me just because wilbur and techno act a little bit older than five. it just ended up being written that way.

Please leave a comment if you enjoy<3

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A New Home

Chapter Notes

more twins content before tommy enjoy<3

Word Count: 5.5k

Edit 03/11/25: Edited more of Wilbur's dialogue along with some of Sapnap's and Q's.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“They’re heavily dehydrated and severely malnourished. The long-haired one er-Technoblade is a bit too underweight for my comfort, so I’d like to put him on a fortified calorie diet to get his weight up, but other than the dehydration and malnourishment he’s quite healthy.” Bad said with an overly optimistic smile before it suddenly dropped from his face,

“It’s Wilbur, I’m more concerned about with his lungs. From what I can infer, the reason Technoblade is so much smaller than his brother is probably that when Wilbur became ill and Technoblade began giving up food to keep up his strength.”

The twins were currently lying in front of him, curled up together in one of the several beds that lined the walls of Bad’s clinic. Techno had his arm wrapped protectively around Wilbur but not in a way that interfered with the machines. At first, they’d been in separate beds but the two men quickly discovered that their conditions seemed to plummet if not at one another’s side. So Phil had scooped Techno into his arms and rested him next to his brother.

Wilbur was currently hooked up to multiple redstone-powered machines that displayed his vitals. There was talk at first of putting a tube in to help the poor boy breathe but that idea had quickly been quashed when he’d had found out about it.

Wilbur had fought so hard against the idea, but his pneumonia had been practically drowning his chest with fluid, the child could hardly breathe. So when Bad brought a needle full of an analgesic, Wilbur had damn near lost it, clutching at Phil in desperation and yelling at the top of his lungs (which didn't end up being very loud), “No! No! Please! I don’ want it! Please, Phil.”

Philza let the boy crash into his arms. The child dug his hands into his shoulders, clinging to him like a lifeline. Phil wrapped his arms around the boy, rocking him gently and speaking to him in a

soft voice, “It’s going to be okay, Wilbur. All it’s going to do is help you sleep so you can allow your body to heal. Nothing more.”

Wilbur’s hands dug into his coat even further, ripping the fabric with his nails. He eyed the syringe warily and eventually cried out, “No! No! No! Don’t let them hurt me! Please! You promised!”

“No one will ever hurt you again, Wilbur.” A voice called out, and Phil turned to see his wife standing in the doorway, arms outstretched. Wilbur immediately ran into her, clinging onto Kristin and sobbing into her skirt. He stayed there for a moment before jolting backward suddenly, his small, frail body curling in on himself, as his body was wracked by yet another fit,

“Please...don’t. I can breathe, I don’t want it! Please let me try!” Wilbur said through the coughs that jerked his entire frame. The boy stepped back from Kristin and adjusted the new glasses he’d been given securely on his face.

His wife knelt down at the boy’s side and spoke softly, “Wilbur. If we allow you not to have the tube then you have to let us put the breathing mask on.”

Wilbur’s expression crumpled and he looked like he wanted to be anywhere else in the world other than here. The boy wrung his hands letting his chin drop to his chest and said warily, “What’s in it? What’s in the air?”

“It’s just oxygen, Wilbur. A bit different from room air, but it’ll help you breathe.”

“Will it hurt?” Wilbur’s voice shook. He backed slowly away from Kristen, inching toward where his brother was sleeping peacefully.

“It’s perfectly safe. It won’t hurt one bit.” The curly-haired boy finally yielded after that, too tired to put up much more of a fight. His body was so weak from fighting to stay alive for so long and he was tired of trying. He finally nodded to the adults in front of him with a defeated expression and allowed them to place a small mask that covered his mouth and nose.

Much to his surprise, breathing soon became a lot easier, his lungs no longer feeling as constricted as they once did and it wasn’t long before his eyelids fluttered shut and he fell into a dreamless slumber.

The two boys spent the next few days adhering to a monotonous cycle, they'd wake, they'd take whatever strange overworld medicine was given to them, then they'd slumber once more.

Techno for the first few days stayed unconscious, unlike Wilbur who would continuously wake himself up every other hour. Bad at some point had to explain to the boy that his brother needed time to regain his strength, but he was greatly improving and would eventually wake up. He wasn't sure how much of it the boy actually believed.

But eventually, Bad's promise proved true and on the third day, he opened his eyes.

It had scared Wilbur half to death the first time Techno had woken, the child had begun to scream loudly in his sleep, tumbling off the bed and backing into a corner.

His eyes were a shade of bright red that was new and unfamiliar compared to their normal dark crimson. The moment Wil had gotten close to his twin to try and figure out what was wrong and comfort him, Techno had swung at him cracking the child across the jaw.

Wilbur cried out and stumbled backward into the bedframe. Something about the action itself and the pain in his brother's face snapped Techno out of it as he realized what he'd done.

By that point, Philza had woken and had rushed into the room to find Techno sobbing in the corner his fingers digging into his ears and his pupils blown wide. Wilbur curled up on the floor hyperventilating but still trying to help his twin calm down.

As Phil knelt by the two boys, scooping Wilbur into his arms he noticed Techno was whispering something, "Sorry. I'm sorry. It's loud. I can't hear myself think. I'm sorry, Wil. I didn't mean it. *I didn't mean to...*"

That was the night they discovered that Techno was no longer alone inside his own mind and most likely never would be again.

It hadn't taken Philza long to realize what or who had cursed his son, no he knew almost immediately who had done it and Kristen had later confirmed it five days later when she visited.

And the worst part of it all was that there was nothing that could be done about it. There was no magic cure or loophole to free Technoblade from the voices that plagued his mind every waking moment. There was nothing to be done except help the child adapt and learn to control them.

The boys were kept under strict medical supervision for their next two weeks at the castle until finally, Bad deemed them healthy enough to leave.

Wilbur had been ecstatic, his lungs were clear for the first time in weeks and he had newfound energy inside him that he'd never felt before. He wanted to run, jump, to play hide and seek with his brother around the castle. His mind was itching to do *something*.

So when the two had finally been moved into their own bedroom, which had just been newly furnished it was truly an incredulous sight to the boy who had slept in a wooden crate most of his life.

Techno had been less happy with the whole ordeal. And after the incident that occurred when he'd first woken up, there had been a distance between the twins that hadn't been there before.

He was quieter now, more reserved. The bags underneath his eyes hadn't faded as Wilbur's had. Wilbur knew he wasn't sleeping well, after all even though there were two beds placed in their rooms, they still preferred to be near one another.

And almost every night for the past two weeks they'd been here, Techno had woken up screaming. Though not since that first night had he'd dared laid a hand on his twin. In fact, whenever, Techno would have an episode the boy would leap out of his bed and run to Philza's room, not bothering to spare Wilbur a second glance.

Phil would later return Techno to his bed when the child had finally calmed down and fallen asleep once more. Wilbur tried not to let it bother him, but it hurt to see his twin be so scared of himself.

Weeks passed like this until finally one night after Techno had already left the room, Wilbur decided he didn't want to spend a moment longer in his room. The child dangled his legs over his

bed and dropped to the floor. He went over to his closet and pulled from the drawers a pair of trousers and shucked them on. He searched for a shirt that didn't have too many buttons since he wasn't very good at buttoning them, and more often than not Phil would have to fix them for him.

He fished out a long-sleeved shirt that was shaded a muted blue, it was a bit too big for his tiny frame but it wasn't as if he was dressing to impress anyone, he was only five after all.

He slipped on his shoes and fiddled with the strings for a frustratingly long moment before huffing in exasperation and tucking them into his shoe instead.

Wilbur looked in the mirror at his mess of an outfit and decided it was good enough. He shook out his pink curls and frowned.

He hated his hair. He hated what the color stood for in his mind. The piglin fumbled open a drawer and grasped the newly stitched beanie Kristen had given him to replace his tattered old one. He stuffed his curls inside of it and frowned when pink and white still stuck out. Wilbur turned his gaze downwards, avoiding the mirror, and then grabbed his glasses before stumbling out of the room.

The five-year-old had been here with his twin for almost a month and still hadn't really explored much of the castle. Sure, he'd seen some of it when he and his brother had been dubbed "princes". He still wasn't sure what the word meant but apparently, it meant people would bow to him now.

He didn't like that so much, but Schlatt had said it was cus-tor-man-ary...or something like that.

Wilbur sprinted down the halls, a smile growing on his face as he flew past a guard who hardly batted an eye at the child, he probably assumed he was some kitchen boy instead of one of the two princes. *Good.*

He kept running, flying across the endless hallways and down staircases until his surroundings no longer looked familiar. Once was good and lost in the palace, he grinned. While most people might be afraid to be lost, Wilbur found it exhilarating. It was like a game for him, to be able to find his way back. He also just loved to explore new places in general. He wanted to know every nook and cranny of his new home, where the best hiding places were, where Phil's endless supply of books came from, and most importantly, where all the food was kept. *Just in case.*

Suddenly a mouthwatering smell caught his attention and his stomach rumbled.

It wasn't a painful growl like the ones he'd experienced most of his life. It simply meant that Wilbur wouldn't turn up his nose to whatever was currently being cooked in the kitchen. The small child followed his nose until he eventually reached what he assumed to be the main kitchen in the palace. People were bustling around him, paying him no mind to the small child as they worked tirelessly to cook up meat pies, soups, fresh vegetables, and more.

Wilbur made his way through the kitchen, growing more and more curious with each step. That was until a hand reached out from underneath a nearby table and pulled him under.

A hand clapped over his mouth and Wilbur didn't hesitate when he bit down on it, the metallic taste of blood stung in his mouth. The person covering his mouth let out a choked yelp and Wilbur heard someone else snicker.

"Serves you right, Q. You know better than to scare someone like that." said the laughing voice. Wilbur turned and his eyes widened when he came face to face with two boys around his age, maybe a little older. Both of the boys had dark hair but that was where the similarities ceased. The first boy had a white bandana wrapped around his forehead and grinned back at him with fiery orange eyes. His skin was pale and his hair was shaggy like his own. His eyes were kind and his posture was casual.

The other boy on the other hand was tense, still holding his injured hand in his own. His hair was short and barely visible as much of it as it was covered by a dark blue beanie. Dark brown eyes glared back at him and cursed under his breath, "Pequeño bastardo me mordió!"

Wilbur tilted his head, confused by the language. It was different from the two he knew. He was fluent in Piglish and English as they were the main languages spoken in his village but he was lost to whatever the shorter boy was saying.

"I'm...sorry?" Wilbur began before the taller boy cut him off, "No no, don't apologize, kid, it's his own fault."

"Sheesh man, you bite hard!" The shorter boy whined finally in a language Wilbur could understand.

“Well of course he does, idiot...he’s a piglin.”

Anger curled in Wilbur’s gut at the word. *Was it really that obvious?*

“I’m *half*-piglin,” Wilbur growled but the fire-eyed boy’s grin only grew.

“Relax kid, you and I are cut from the same cloth. I’m from the Nether too. I’m a blaze-hybrid. My name’s Sapnap, and this is...”

“I can say my own freaking name!” The boy huffed before stretching out his injured hand to Wilbur, which was still slightly bloody from Wilbur chomping on it, “My name is Quackity, and I am *not* from the Nether.”

Wilbur raised his eyebrows at that, but delicately shook Quackity’s hand regardless.

“So...now that we’ve gotten all that out of the way. What exactly are you doing down in the servant’s hall, your highness?”

Quackity’s eyes widened comically and he sputtered, looking frantically back and forth between Wilbur and Sapnap before finally staring slack-jawed at Wilbur, “You...*You’re the new prince?! “*

“Trust me, I’m just as surprised as you.” Wilbur grinned, the tenseness from his posture finally seeping away, leaving him relaxed in the presence of the other two.

“Well, at least you’re not a brat like shorty over here. You seem pretty smart too for a little kid.” Sapnap laughed and then winced when Quackity kicked him.”

Wilbur's pointed ears went red at the compliment. Even when he and Techno lived in the Nether, Wilbur had always strived to learn, reading whatever he could get his hands on. Their mother had taught both boys to read a little bit before she had her killed for mating with someone outside of their race.

“Well, not old enough to know how to tie your shoes, or tuck in your shirt, *primes*.“ Quackity giggled earning his own thwack from Sapnap. Wilbur’s face flushed an even deeper shade of red. He growled back at the boy,

“It’s harder than it looks okay? I couldn’t figure out the strings and I didn’t want to wake Phil...” Wilbur frowned, Quackity merely rolled his eyes and leaned down to Wilbur’s shoes, tying them tightly into a neat bow.

“Thanks...” Wilbur muttered appreciatively.

“Eh, don’t mention it. But I’m never letting go of the fact that the lowly kitchen boy had to help *oh so* great prince of the realm tie his shoelaces.” Quackity grinned evilly and Wilbur playfully shoved him.

“So where is your twin? Pinkie #2 couldn’t crash the party as well?” Sapnap asked, fiddling with a loose string on the cuff of his black button-down.

“Uh...well Techno had a bad dream so my da-er Phil was helping him calm down.” Suddenly he winced, “Don’t call me that.”

“Call you what, Pinkie?” Quackity teased and Wilbur’s face fell. Quackity’s eyes immediately softened, “Hey, it was a joke, dude. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean anything by it. Your hair is cool dude, especially with that sick streak in it.”

“I hate it. I wish it wasn’t pink. I look like them.” Wilbur sniffled and buried his face in his hands.

Sapnap hummed for a moment before his eyes lit up. “You don’t want it pink you say? How would you feel about brown? Like your mom’s hair.”

“You can do that?” Wilbur’s eyes widened and a shaky smile broke on his face.

“Sure, *mi amigo*! The Captain likes to dye half her hair that color and it looks sick on her! We should go ask her!” Quackity exclaimed, causing Sapnap to shush him.

“Would Puffy even be up at this hour?” Sapnap asked after Quackity had settled.

“She should be. Foolish said she was working late tonight.” Quackity stated matter-of-factly. The smile on Wilbur’s face spread wider until it matched the excitement on Quackity’s. The boy grabbed at his hand and pulled him out from the table with Sapnap following shortly behind.

Suddenly a voice from the other side of the kitchen screeched, “Quackity! I see you boy! Get over here.”

A large cranky woman with graying hair and beady eyes stared all three boys down with a fiery hatred. Quackity paled significantly and looked over at the two, mouthing, “Run.”

The three boys sprinted out of the kitchen at light speed while the cook screamed behind them, “Brats! Get back here! Your father will be hearing of this Sapnap!”

Sapnap winced at that but they kept running nonetheless. Wilbur wasn’t exactly sure which part of the castle they were in but Sapnap seemed to know every nook and cranny of the palace. After a while of running, Wilbur’s lungs began to scream at him. He may be fully recovered from his illness but he still got moments where he felt his lungs grow tight as the air became scarce. Wilbur stumbled to a halt and leaned over placing his hands on his knees.

The other boys noticed and turned back. Quackity set a hand on the prince’s shoulder, “You good, dude?”

“Is it your lungs, highness?” Sapnap asked and Wilbur nodded, still trying to catch his breath. Suddenly voices echoed behind him and Sapnap’s eyes widened.

“Quick! Hop on my back. I’ll just carry you.” Wilbur didn’t exactly have much of choice and climbed onto the older boy’s back and wrapped his arms loosely over Sapnap’s shoulders.

As soon as Wil was secure they were running once more. The boys passed through what Wilbur assumed to be the Great Hall and then out a side door. They raced up a flight of stairs into a nicer section of the castle that was slightly more familiar than the servant’s hall but not by much. This

wasn't the floor or hall his brother and Phil lived on so Wilbur could only assume that this was perhaps where the people slightly less important than the Emperor lived.

They turned a hall and came to a door that the young prince guessed led to the Captain's quarters. Sapnap set Wilbur down on the ground and turned back to him, "Feeling any better your highness?"

"It's Wilbur. 'Your highness' sounds like your talking to someone who didn't spend the first five years of their life living in an alley." Wilbur snarked and Sapnap nodded, "Yeah well you might want to get used to that regardless, Wilbur. It's not going to change anytime soon."

"Also how else are we meant to tease you if I can't make 'eat the rich' jokes?" Quackity giggled.

Wilbur rolled his eyes and punched Quackity's arm, but the dark-haired boy simply pulled Wilbur's beanie over his eyes.

"How old are the two of you anyway?" Wilbur asked suddenly, pushing his beanie back up and swatting at Quackity.

"I'm eight and shorty here is six. So maybe you're not the only one who acts a bit too grown-up for your age, ey?"

"It comes free of charge with the poverty." Quackity snickered and Wilbur tilted his head at the unfamiliar word. He tried to sound it out, "Pov-erdy?"

"*Poverty*. It means Quackity is broke, or poor." Sapnap amended. Wilbur frowned and looked closer at Quackity but before he could make an assumption Quackity snapped back.

"Don't look at me like that, your *highness*. I don't need your pity. I might not have gotten off as easy as you and Sap but I don't need to. I'll make my own way in this world." Suddenly his expression softened, "Plus being a kitchen boy means free food and a warm bed, which is more than most kids like me get."

Wilbur was about to respond when a sharp voice boomed from behind the three, “And what exactly are you three doing up at this hour, hm?”

They whipped around and came face to face with Chancellor Schlatt and the Captain who trailed not far behind, looking just as intimidating.

Quackity’s head ducked low, his worn clothing and dirty face making him stick out like a sore thumb compared to the other two boys. Wilbur stepped in front of him, letting the shorter boy hide behind him.

“Your highness? Your father has been looking for you. He just about set half the palace guard on a manhunt for you. And Sapnap...you’re father is close to doing the same.” Puffy said sternly, disappointment painting her expression.

“But Puffy! Wil-er...*his highness* was just exploring the castle and got a bit lost. Quackity and I were just helping him find his way back when he asked a favor us, right, highness?” Sapnap gave him a pointed look.

Wilbur cleared his throat and tried to look as tall as he could, “I know it’s late and I know I’ve already caused enough trouble. But it’s about my hair. It’s really bothering me. Don’t be mad at Sapnap and Quackity they were just trying to help me. We were actually trying to find you, Captain.”

“Your...hair?” Schlatt raised a brow, and Wilbur further ducked his head. He took a deep breath before he began rambling,

“It’s the color. I know Techno likes his pink, says he’ll keep it pink as a reminder that we never have to go back there. But I...” Wilbur sniffled, giving Puffy and Schlatt a sad tearful look, “I hate it. I don’t want my hair to be pink. I don’t want any reminders. Sapnap said...you dye your hair and it looks cool.”

Wilbur twisted his hands together and looked down pitifully at the floor to really sell it as he finished, “Could you make mine look cool too?”

Puffy's stern expression crumbled like sand while Schlatt's conformed to that of vague surprise. Suddenly the horned man let out a laugh, seeing through Wilbur's attempt to elicit pity out of the both of them like glass, "Well I be damned, aren't you a little devious little shit, ey?"

Schlatt knelt in front of Wilbur and the tuft of pink hair sticking out of his beanie, "So...what color were you thinking, kid?"

"Brown. Like Kristen's?" Wilbur's voice wobbled.

"Brown it is. Puff you still got that leftover dye from last time?" Schlatt asked, turning towards the sheep-hybrid.

The Captain seemed startled by the question, apparently, she was still reeling from Wilbur's little performance.

"Yeah, I think I left it beneath the bathroom sink, why don't you get started while I escort these two back to their quarters."

"Fair enough, I owe you after screwing up your roots up last time." Schlatt snorted.

"Wait...you dye Puffy's hair?" Sapnap asked, looking entirely lost.

"Of course I do, Puffy is hopeless with hair. I've been dyeing her hair since I was a teenager and his majesty was still a vegetable."

"I'm not *that* bad." Puffy grumbled before pressing a hand to Quackity and Sapnap's upper back.

"Wait!" Quackity turned with his eyes wide as they landed back on Wilbur. His voice squeaked as he choked out hopefully, "See you later?"

Wilbur grinned back at the brown-eyed boy, "Definitely."

The prince watched as Quackity and Sapnap were escorted out of sight, his face dropping when he could no longer see his new friends.

“Oh don’t look so down kid. Sapnap is Bad’s son and wherever Sapnap goes that little kitchen boy isn’t too far behind. You’ll see them soon. Now, you wait here while I go grab the dye. If we’re doing this, it’ll be in *Phil’s bathroom*.” Schlatt said, humor glinting in his eyes.

“Why’s that?” Wilbur asked, confused why it mattered.

“Watching him try to scrub brown dye out of his marble sink will be the highlight of the week for me,” Schlatt said as if it was obvious before ducking into Puffy’s quarters.

It wasn’t long before he came back out with a plain cardboard box that was half-dyed a dark brown. With his other free hand, he scooped the scrawny five-year-old into his other arm much to the boy’s dismay.

“Oh shush, I don’t have any kids of my own to chuck around like ragdolls so you and your brother will have to do.”

“You don’t have kids?” Wilbur asked, not surprised. But maybe a little since almost all the other important adults Wilbur had met did. Puffy had Foolish and Bad had Sapnap. Sam, a man Wilbur had only met once since he spent most of his time guarding the dungeon, didn’t seem to have kids but he did have one heck of a guard dog, Fran. Which in Wilbur’s professional five-year-old opinion was close enough.

“Hell no, I’m like twenty, kid. Puffy’s eight years older than me and Bad is Prime-only-knows years older than me. Most of the officials you’ll meet are older than me. I’m way too young to have a kid.” Schlatt said wheezing out a laugh before adding, “I know. The side chops make me look older, right?”

“Do you want kids?” Wilbur’s question had Schlatt pausing for a long moment, his expression like stone. Finally he spoke, “Nah. I’d be a shit dad. I’m better off just being an uncle.”

Wilbur disagreed, but decided not to say anything, it didn't seem like a subject Schlatt enjoyed. The two turned a corner and went up another flight of stairs and suddenly the hallways looked familiar again.

"Are you happy here, your highness? Phil...uh-your dad...er I don't know if your at that stage yet actually." Schlatt fumbled over his words for a moment before sighing and trying again, "The Emperor, well he cares about you and your brother a great deal. I know it's probably way too early to see him as your dad, but that's what he wants to be for you and Techno. And as the Emperor's right-hand man, I want him to be happy. *Don't ever tell him I said that.*"

Wilbur giggled at that and answered in kind, "Phil saved our lives. My brother and I owe him and Kristen a lot. He's given us everything we could've ever asked for and he does everything he can for Techno. Which is all *I* could ask for. While I can't speak for my brother, I'm happy. It's weird going from being nothing to being something though."

"Heh. I bet it is." Schlatt said shaking his head, suddenly he paused just outside the entrance to the royal wing of the castle. "Hey, has Phil mentioned what that third bedroom is for? I know that you and your brother share a room right now but there is another empty one for one of you when you get older...but there is still another. Any idea what it's for?"

Wilbur frowned and shook his head, "No idea."

"Wilbur!" A voice called out from down the hall and Wilbur turned his head to see Phil rushing over to them, a sleeping Technoblade curled up in one arm.

The two men met just in front of the door to the third bedroom and wordlessly exchanged children without skipping a beat.

"Are you okay?!" Philza cried, scanning over the boy frantically for any signs of injury. Wilbur scrunched up his nose and giggled, "I'm fine, Phil. I just went out for a walk is all."

Using his free hand, Phil pinched the bridge of his nose, "Wil, we've been over this. You need to *tell me* when you leave this wing of the castle! It's not safe for someone as small as you, and especially not at night!"

“What’s difference does the big light make?” Wilbur asked, confusion furrowed in his brow.

Schlatt chuckled at that, “The Sun, Wilbur. It’s called the Sun. Here in the overworld, when we see the sun we know it’s time to work, play, etc. But when the sun goes down, that means it’s time for sleep.”

“But you and Phil are awake when the Sun isn’t?” The pink-haired boy pointed out smartly, causing Schlatt to scoff.

“Your father and I are adults, Wilbur. Which means we can stay up a little while longer. But a small fry like yourself needs to be asleep when the Sun is down.”

Philza cut in at that, “Not to mention it’s not safe to be out at night, even here in the castle. It’s easy to get lost and there is always a chance that someone bad could sneak into the castle.”

Wilbur frowned, “But no one bothers me at night. Most people couldn’t even tell who I was.”

“That’s not very reassuring, Wilbur. What if you had gotten hurt and couldn’t get back to me or call out to anyone? What if you’d be taken? I came back into your room to put Techno back in bed and when I couldn’t find you...” Phil paused for a moment, his expression distant before he cleared his throat, “Just promise me you won’t go wandering around the castle at three in the morning anymore, okay?”

The hybrid sighed, “Fine...I promise.”

A hand comes up to press against Wil’s face and while it was clearly met as a sign of affection it didn’t stop the young boy from flinching involuntarily. The hurt that flashes through Phil’s eyes is brief, gone in an instant but Wilbur catches it nonetheless.

Ever since the twins had arrived there had been moments like this, where Phil, Kristin, or really any of the staff would move too quickly and frighten the boys. Most of the time, the twins could brush it off, pretend they hadn’t just jumped back five feet from a hand being placed on their shoulder. Other times it would cause them to panic and they’d forget they were no longer in the Nether.

“Sorry.” The boy mumbles, pressing his face into Phil’s shoulder, hiding his face from view.

“Don’t apologize, mate. I understand that this is all new to you, nobody is expecting you to immediately adjust to all this, Wilbur. It’ll take time, but eventually, you’ll stop seeing us as a threat.” Philza promised, pressing his cheek into the boy's hair.

Wilbur pulled back, his expression wobbly, “I don’t mean to. I know you wouldn’t hurt me, but sometimes I forget. I’m s-”

“You don’t have anything to be sorry for, Wil. It’s up to me to gain that trust, okay? Now, what’s with the box of hair dye, Schlatt.” Phil asked, eyeing the box warily.

Schlatt grinned and eyed Wilbur, “Tell him what you told me.”

Wilbur eyed the box once more and then looked to his brother who was still passed out in Schlatt’s arms. *He’ll get over it.*

“I want to dye my hair brown.” He said confidently and was surprised when Philza didn’t seem the least bit shocked by the idea. In fact, he wasn’t fazed by it all. Instead, he had this strange knowing look that puzzled Wilbur and Schlatt to no end. Philza stretched out his hand towards Schlatt’s who immediately passed the box over to him and smiled,

“Then brown it will be.”

And brown it was.

And yes, Technoblade was absolutely *pissed* the next day.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter should be out soon...i hope.

also have fun ripping good jschlatt out of my cold dead hands.

please leave a comment if you enjoyed<3

https://www.instagram.com/_emiartse/ <<

His Eyes Were the Color of the Sea.

Chapter Notes

teehee more twins duo (more techno-centered today) and...my favorite dysfunctional chancellor

TW: Implied Child Abuse

other than that, this chapter is just an UNGODLY amount of fluff. I'm giving yall fluff in bulk rn before I have to rip it away :D

Word Count: 5.1k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Months passed and life slowly evolved into some semblance of normality for the twins. Sure, every now and then the two would be required to appear by their father whenever he was giving some big speech, but the Emperor tried his best to keep his sons out of public view as much as he could. At the very least until the boys were a little older and better adjusted.

Techno's nightmares gradually tapered off in occurrence, but they never stopped. Neither did Wilbur's. But they didn't happen nearly as often anymore. Sure there were still bad nights, there would always be bad nights but his sons were finally sleeping through them now.

It wasn't long afterward that Phil had started lessons for them. Wilbur flourished and began practically inhaling every book that he could read. Most books were far too advanced for his level, given that he'd never really had any proper schooling. But for his young age? Wilbur was advancing far quicker in his studies than most children twice his age.

Technoblade on the other hand seemed to enjoy school and learning new things but struggled constantly to focus. His mind always wandering during lessons, too crowded to truly focus on the task at hand. It frustrated the child to no end considering how much he desperately wanted to learn.

"Every time. Every time I try, *they* block me out! They're so *loud*. And it *never* ends! They *want blood*. They want to fight! They want attention! But they never listen to *what I want!*" Techno vented to Phil one day after he'd been overwhelmed by the chatter in his head to the point he'd stumbled from his desk and into the dark corner of the classroom.

When the tutor had tried to coax him out, he apparently had growled at her. He might have gone farther if Wilbur hadn't placed himself in between the two.

And while the chat in his head craved blood, they also seemed to recognize Techno's own feelings. After the night he'd woken up and attacked Wilbur, the chat had settled considerably in the young boy's mind. Technoblade could sense they felt just as bad about the ordeal as he did.

At first, Techno truly believed his chat was a soulless demon that only wanted one thing, but he was wrong. Chat wanted many things, mainly blood, but also affection, happiness, and attention. But above all, they wanted to protect Techno's family.

Chat loved Wilbur as Techno loved Wilbur. Chat wanted affection from Kristin as he often craved it. Chat sought to be comforted by Philza whenever he needed it.

Chat was almost like a strange entity attached to Techno, flooded with thoughts and emotions of their own that they wanted Techno to listen to.

It had taken some time but eventually, Chat realized that they were hurting Techno, and they backed off a bit, becoming a consistent buzzing in the back of his mind. Of course every now and again, a part of the entity would yell something and all of Chat would begin chanting like a hivemind of bees. Or perhaps Techno would find himself unable to do a task and suddenly Chat would begin screaming for Phil. Maybe Techno would find himself missing his twin whenever they weren't in the same room and Chat would go absolutely feral.

And whenever Techno was trying to focus? Chat would get bored and start talking loudly amongst themselves much to Techno's chagrin. And then there were days like this when Chat's incessant need for blood to be spilled overwhelmed them like an addict who needed their next fix. It was a craving. A want. A *need* to harm.

And Techno despised them for it. Or at least, he wanted to.

"How would you feel about working with Sam and Puffy?" Philza asked one night as the three of them sat together peacefully in the library. The fireplace in front of them crackled soothingly and the warm heat emanating from the hearth had dulled Chat into a lethargic hum in Techno's mind. It was the quietest they had ever been in the eight months since he'd first heard them in the alleyway. The three of them were settled atop pillows and blankets built into a small reading nest.

Phil of course sat in the middle and had *The Hero and The Minotaur* open on his lap. Wilbur had long since fallen asleep listening to it. The now-brunette (much to Techno's disapproval. Just because he understood why his brother had dyed his hair didn't mean he had to like it) was curled up against Phil's side, with his head resting on his right leg.

Techno on the other hand was leaning heavily against Phil's left side completely enthralled by the contents of the book. A deep-rooted thought in the back of his mind that he would never admit to anyone bubbled up in his mind, *I can't wait to tell Chat about this story.*

Chat, after all, had pretty much fallen asleep alongside Wilbur. He supposed that even the voices in his head need their rest as well.

"Techno?" Phil roused the boy gently from his thoughts, brushing a hand through his long hair. The boy gently tilted up his head, which was leaning against Phil's shoulder, and offered a querying hum.

"Did you hear what I asked?" Phil chuckled softly so as to not wake Wilbur whose glasses sat askew on his face.

Techno shuffled through his memory for a moment before finally remembering, "Something about Sam and Puffy?"

"Yes, that's right. I wanted to know how you felt about them giving you lessons. Puffy offered the other day and wanted me to ask." Phil stated, flipping to the next page of the book and then marking it with a slip of paper so their spot was saved.

"What kind of lessons?" Techno wondered, confused since he already had plenty of teachers at this point.

"Well, I know you've been struggling to focus in class thanks to 'Chat' so Sam suggested to Puffy that perhaps all you need is an outlet for *them*. They want to teach you to fight."

And oh boy did Chat stir at the mention of that.

Fight?

Fighting pog.

Blood.

E.

DADZA POG

FIGHT FIGHT FIGHT

i think wilbur is drooling KEKW

when does the tangled part st—

sHUT UPPPP SHHHHH NO BACKSEATING

TECHNOFIGHT

Blood for the Blood God.

Techno winced as a cacophony of voices began yelling in his head, and as quickly as it began the voices stopped and returned to an apologetic murmur. It seemed they realized they were interrupting Philza and stopped immediately.

Weird.

“*Yeah.* They seem to like the idea.” Techno responded, pinching the bridge of his nose as his head throbbed from sudden overstimulation.

“Perfect, I’ll talk to Puffy about it the next time I see her and we’ll set it up,” Phil said with a smile. Techno returned it with a rare one of his own and settled back against his shoulder with a content sigh.

“Are you tired, Techno? Do you still want to keep reading?” Phil asked, tucking a stray strand of hair back behind his ear.

The boy nodded enthusiastically and Phil chuckled and opened the book once more.

Techno lasted another two pages before drifting off to sleep as well. Phil decided he didn't need to go back to his office tonight after all. He curled his wings around his two sons and let his eyes flutter shut.

He dreams of a golden-haired toddler running his fingers softly through a single black raven wing. The wing had a pinkish-red gradient of feathers that trailed from the middle of the wing all the way down to the end feathers. The owner of the wing was tuning a violin while the boy was gently pulling out loose feathers with shaky hands.

The detail that Philza clung to however was that the owner of the wings had long straight pink hair that fell to his shoulders.

"Your highness, *eyes on me*. You must stay focused if you want to remain on your feet and stay alive," said the man in front of him. His striking black eyes (and when he said black he meant there was no white sclera at all in his eyes.) focused back on his and the only indication Technoblade had that the man was looking for him was his light grey pupils that reflected himself.

His vibrant green hair was pulled up into a small low half-bun that barely held a third of his hair. The creeper-hybrid swung his wooden sword overhead causing the boy to stumble backward, barely able to dodge the attack. His own wooden sword felt heavy in his small hands, unbalanced.

The scrawny six-year-old decided to utilize his smallness to his advantage and dove under Sam's legs. The man whirled around so fast that Techno had just barely rolled back onto his feet before another slash of the sword was being directed at him, this one unavoidable as there wasn't enough time for Techno to dive to his right.

He scrunched his eyes tightly as he waited for the blow. It never came. Instead, the dull wooden blade stopped a mere inch from Techno's neck.

"Dead," Sam said without malice or smugness. Instead, he dropped his sword and lifted the boy back to his feet.

“You did well, you used your height to your advantage.” Pride gleamed in his eye but Techno’s brow still furrowed frustratedly anyway.

“I still lost though. I was too slow and my roll was *sloppy*.” Techno said critically. Sam’s hand came to rest on his shoulder as he knelt down beside the child.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. You’re the only six-year-old I know that can fight as hard as you can. Most kids your age can’t even pick up a sword. You’re a fast learner and one day you’ll be able to knock me flat on my ass. I can already tell.”

Techno’s face burned sheepishly at the praise and he mumbled out a 'thanks' before handing his sword back to Sam as he did after every session he’d had for the past three months.

This time though, Sam shook his head and smiled, “Keep it. You’ve earned it, your highness.” The man ruffled his hair and it was only when Sam left that Techno allowed himself to beam giddily to himself.

Chat praising him as well didn’t help to wipe the smile off his face.

sam proud

gg

10%

lets gooo technopog

E E E

warden man is proud

YOU DID SO WELL

go pig boy go

“Chat please, I’m trying so hard not to freak out here. Please calm down.” Techno whispered and for once they listened and settled back into the familiar hum he’d grown accustomed to over the past year.

“Your Highness, come here please.” A familiar voice called out and Techno turned to see Puffy standing at the door that led back inside the castle. Currently, Sam was training Techno in a part of the Emperor’s private gardens that had been renovated into a small training ground for Phil and any member of the royal family. The plot of land was surrounded by greenery that the Empress had picked out herself but hadn’t been able to plant because...well...Goddess of Death.

The ground beneath them was covered by a traditional tatami flooring that protected both their feet and the ground itself. Over to the left of them was a small pond with strange colorful bug-eyed fish that Techno had never seen before arriving at the castle.

Wilbur said they were called ‘Koi fish’. Techno had called him a nerd.

“Your Highness,” Puffy called out again, humor in her voice as she noticed the prince zoning out again.

“Sorry,” Techno said ducking his head. He strapped his new sword into one of the loops on his trousers and ran over to where Puffy was waiting for him.

“How was training with Sam today, your highness?” Puffy asked as she began leading him back inside.

“He beat me. *Again.*” Not that it was any different when he trained with Puffy. The two were practically legends with their weapons, with Puffy favoring the sword while Sam leaned more towards an axe or hammer (though he had yet to use either on Techno).

“Your highness, if you could beat Sam at the age that you are, Sam wouldn’t be the Warden anymore,” Puffy said with a laugh and patted the young prince gently on the back. Techno merely frowned and decided to change the subject,

“Where are we going, this doesn’t lead back to my room?”

“I have to make a quick pitstop at the kitchen, apparently something has been left down there that requires my attention, not sure what it is but it’s not a threat so I thought you could come with me,” Puffy said cheerfully, her two-toned hair that was tied up into a ponytail swaying behind her.

Her normal professional attire was meant only for the Captain of the Guard (A long dark blue coat accentuated by silver buttons and shoulder guards. Matched with dark blue pants. It was meant to complement the more snow blue color that represented the Antarctic Empire) Instead Puffy wore a white button-down tucked into a high-waisted pair of brown trousers. It was matched with a worn pair of black boots and an orange sash tied around her waist where her shirt was tucked in.

She appeared more laid-back than usual without her normally flawless attire, more human.

“You wear clothes like that more often, you seem a lot more comfortable in it than that stuffy suit,” Techno commented and Puffy let out a laugh, a real one. Not the strained chuckle that didn’t quite reach her eyes.

“I think your dad might have some issues with that, your highness.”

“Phil would do anything to ditch his professional attire, he prefers green much more over the light blue monkey suits everyone makes him wear. At the very least, he seems more like Phil when he wears green, more like my d-. Well...you know what I mean.” Techno cut himself off. It wasn’t that he didn’t see Phil as his father, he absolutely did.

He just wasn’t quite ready to verbalize it, and neither was Wilbur. It didn’t seem to bother Phil in the slightest, however, he knew he was their father and they knew it too so what was the rush?

“Very much so, but unfortunately as the Emperor, he’s expected to always look respectable. It’s a standard that you and your brother will also be expected to conform to one day.”

Techno wrinkled his nose at that.

As the two drew near the servants' hall, Techno could begin to hear the busied voices of the kitchen staff who were hard at work preparing enough food to feed an entire castle.

They entered the main kitchen and Techno instinctively ducked behind Puffy's legs as every eye in the room turned to him. Collectively the room acknowledge his presence as people around him curtsied or bowed to the young prince. A large woman with graying hair came up to Puffy and said in a sickly sweet voice that grated at his ears, "Your Highness and the Captain are most welcome down here. I assume you received the message I sent, correct?"

A small boy with dark hair and a shiner on his left eye caught Techno's attention from underneath one of the tables.

Quackity?

"Yes, now what's this all about?" Puffy answered as Techno grinned at Quackity while he mockingly impersonated the Kitchen lady without making any sound. Instead, he acted out her over-the-top expressions and stuck-up posture. From the corner of his eye, Techno could see Puffy try to stifle a smile.

Techno had to stifle his laughter with his hand when the boy began doing his impression of a penguin by waddling on his knees, At one point he accidentally thudded his head on the wood, and Techno bit his tongue to keep from bursting into laughter. Eventually, after a moment, Quackity decided he'd had enough and crawled out from under the table.

"Your highness." The boy said giving Techno a mock salute. The lady whirled around and her face went bright angry red at the sight of the boy. If he squinted, Techno was positive he could see smoke coming from her ears.

"Boy! I thought I told you to—" The crabby old woman began before Techno gracefully cut her off and said warmly,

“Hello, Quackity. I haven’t seen you in a bit. Wilbur misses you.”

Quackity rolled his eyes at that and grinned, “He should come to visit me more often then. But tell him I suppose I miss his highness as well.”

Suddenly his eyes widened as he recalled the reason he was here. He completely disregarded the two adults and grabbed Techno’s hand, “Come on dude, follow me! I’ve got something to show you.”

The two boys darted off with Puffy yelling out to wait for her. Techno swore he heard the Head Cook mutter out something vile at his friend. They rounded a corner into what looked like a smaller kitchen with a backdoor that Techno guessed was where grocers dropped off palace supplies.

The room was surprisingly empty with most of the staff being in the main kitchen at the moment. However, sitting on one of the many large oaken tables meant to prepare food was a rain-soaked box.

“You wanted to show me...a box?” Techno asked, his tone flat.

Quackity rolled his eyes and nudged his shoulder, “Inside the box, genius. Take a look.”

There was a chair next to the table that appeared tall enough for Techno to climb onto. He hoisted himself onto the stool and then onto the table. His brain shorted a bit when he heard something coo.

Techno turned to the box and looked inside.

Sitting in the box...was a baby.

A boy, maybe six or seven months old with dark brown hair and equally brown goat-like ears stared back at him, His eyes were so blue they looked like sapphires sparkling back at him. He was wearing a threadbare long-sleeved green onesie that was way too big for him. The baby noticed Techno and made a grabbing motion at him.

“Found him about an hour ago when I was bringing in food. Someone just *dumped* him at the door like garbage. I nearly stepped on the little guy.” Quackity frowned and climbed up beside Techno. The baby immediately lost interest in the prince and babbled something incoherent at Quackity.

“I think he likes you,” Techno said with a laugh as the baby tried to gnaw on one of his fingers.

“Whoever left him at least bothered to leave a note. Ms. Jenkins is reading it to the Captain I think, apparently, the mom named someone to take care of him, his father...or something? I dunno, didn’t have time to read it before she snatched it from me.”

“Is she the one who gave you that?” Techno’s hand pointed to the nasty bruise on his eye. From what he could tell, it looked pretty recent.

“This? Nah.” Quackity brushed off casually, “I got this from running into a door. It was just an accident.”

Lie.

He’s lying.

Chat whispered amongst themselves and Techno nodded, internally promising them that he’d tell Phil about it. Instead, Techno gave the boy a strained smile, “If you say so, dude.”

Eager to change the subject, Quackity piped, “Oh the letter said his name too!” The raven-haired boy leaned over the box and made a face at the baby.

“Isn’t that right, Tubbo?” Quackity grinned as he crossed his eyes and stuck out his tongue, causing Tubbo to burst into giggles.

Suddenly voices echoed behind them, “I’d like to see this for myself, now *please move aside.*” Puffy growled.

“Fine. Suit yourself. But I’ve already informed the head of the orphanage about him, there is no reason to bother him with this boy.” The head cook growled and the two boys could hear as she stomped away. Puffy rounded the corner looking exasperated and groaned, “Goddess above, I thought she’d never *shut up*.”

Quackity shot back with a smirk on his face, “She never does.” Puffy walked behind the two boys and peered over them to take a long look at Tubbo. Techno could hear her sharply inhale as she took in his features.

The Captain was silent for a long time, not moving in the slightest as she stared at the baby with a thoughtful look. Eventually, Techno spoke, “Puff? What is it?”

Suddenly Puffy growled, but it wasn’t directed at any of them. “I’m going to *throttle* him.”

“Who?” Quackity asked when the Captain didn’t further elaborate. Puffy didn’t respond. She simply pinched at the bridge of her nose as if she had a headache. She looked extremely stressed.

Finally, the Captain took a deep breath and looked at the two, “Quackity, I need you to go find Sapnap and ask him to tell his father that he needs to meet me in my office as soon as possible. Can you do that?”

The seven-year-old hopped off the table and stood tall in front of the Captain as if he’d just been given some heroic quest. He saluted Puffy and proclaimed, “I’ll do my best, Captain.”

Puffy gave a strained smile as he darted out of the room. She then turned to Techno, “Your highness, I need you to take Tubbo and go find his Majesty. I believe he’s with Wilbur in the library at the moment. Normally I wouldn’t leave you alone like this without an escort but I have some *very important* calls to make now. One of the guards should be able to help you to the library. Can you do this?”

“I can.” Techno nodded his head affirmatively and hopped off the table. Puffy picked up Tubbo from his box and handed him to the young prince.

“Oof, you’re heavy.” Techno griped as he wobbled for a minute before steadying himself. Puffy’s hands were placed precariously under the baby, making sure Techno wasn’t going to drop him. The prince noticed her expression and reassured her, “Don’t worry, Captain. I’ve got him.”

“You sure?” Puffy said, unconvinced.

Techno shifted Tubbo higher up in his arms and was able to gain a much more secure grasp on the squirming baby. He turned to face the Captain, “I got him.”

And with that Techno set off with Tubbo toward the Library.

“Puffy slow down! At least tell me where we are going? *Ow, ow, ow, ear! Ear, Puff!*” Schlatt winced as he was harshly dragged through the hallway by his ear. The sheep was fucking *furios* and Jschlatt had no idea why. She had just burst into his office with a look so dark it could probably kill and began tugging him violently along after her.

From what the ram could tell, they were making their way up through the main part of the castle to Phil’s office. Schlatt swallowed nervously. *Just how badly had he fucked up?*

Suddenly Puffy stopped and whirled around, her fist gripped tightly around his collar. She slammed Schlatt up against a wall and her eyes flashed red as she hissed,

“I will *not* send that boy to an orphanage Jschlatt. *I will not.* You are a fucking adult and this is *your fault*. He didn’t ask for this life. ***You gave it to him.*** I refuse to let you ruin his life just because you’re too chickenshit to be a father.”

Schlatt stared blankly at her for what seemed like hours, his mind refusing to process what the Captain had just screamed at him. Eventually, he rasped out through his teeth, “*What the fuck are you talking about?*”

Suddenly from down the hallway, Schlatt saw Wilbur peek his head from the Emperor’s office. The boy cups his hands around his mouth and shouts,

“Phil says you aren’t allowed to murder Schlatt before him. Put him down, Captain.”

What the hell is going on?

The Captain let him drop to the floor, muttering curses as she stalked off but not before glaring at Schlatt one more time. Schlatt's knees wobbled as he slid down the wall towards the ground. He eyed the Emperor’s office nervously.

I am so fired, aren’t I?

A hand tugged Schlatt from his thoughts and the brunette looked up to see Wilbur grunting with effort as he tried to pull the man to his feet.

“*Move. Your. Butt.*” Wilbur strained and while normally this would cause Schlatt to laugh and tease the brunette, this time the ram just listened and shakily stood to his feet. The prince dragged him along, bringing him inside Philza’s office.

As soon as he was inside, Wilbur gently patted Schlatt on the arm as sympathetically as he could and then darted out the room. Schlatt could hear the young prince giggle as he met his brother and they sprinted to their room.

He looked around the office and saw Phil standing by the window. The blonde was facing away from Schlatt but something was making noise in his arms. Schlatt took a shaky breath.

“Your Majesty?” His voice cracked unnaturally. The man didn’t think he’d ever been so uncomposed in his life but right now he was fucking terrified of whatever was about to happen.

“Did you know he existed, Schlatt? Or did you just ignore and refuse to acknowledge him at all? Tell me the truth.” Phil’s voice was barely above a whisper as it growled darkly through the room.

“What on earth are you talking about? Will someone please tell me what’s going on?” Schlatt cried his hands digging into his hair. Phil’s voice boomed loudly throughout the room,

“Did you know you had a son, Jschlatt?!”

Schlatt’s words turn to dust in his mouth as everything in his world seemed to freeze in time. Everything except him, Phil, and the baby sitting in Phil’s arms that was still out of Schlatt’s sight.

“...I have a son?” Schlatt echoed, his eyes wide and terrified as he wracked through his brain for how, when, where, who, etc. He’d been with a few girls in the past, *sure*. But none of them had ever lasted longer than a week. And suddenly now he had a kid? How could this have happened? What was he supposed to do?

And then Phil turned around and suddenly none of it mattered.

All that mattered was the blue-eyed boy with hair as brown as his own and ram-like ears that were too big for his head staring back at him.

Schlatt took an unconscious step forward as he took in the sight of this tiny creature that resembled him so much you would have to be blind to not see it. His heart pounded in his chest. There was no way the little boy who had his hands in his mouth was his own.

He could never create something so perfect. It was impossible. Or at least it had been because the evidence was staring him down with dark blue eyes that resembled the sea.

Not the greenish-blue murky water or the crystal clear waves. No, his eyes reminded him of the ocean Puffy had described to him when they’d made their way through two large bottles of rum one night not long after Philza had woken.

When the sky was so clear and the waves so smooth that you couldn’t tell the ocean from the azure sky above it. That was the color of the eyes that looked back at him.

“I’ll take that as a ‘no’ then.” Philza chuckled, all the anger in his voice had vanished as he watched Schlatt’s entranced expression. Tubbo looked at Schlatt with a curious expression. He babbled something to himself and then with two tiny chubby fists he reached him.

Schlatt stretched out a hand without thinking and then pulled back, hesitant and terrified. Once he did this, there was no going back. He wouldn’t be able to live with himself if he changed his mind or chickened out.

This was the moment where Schlatt had to decide.

“I won’t force you into this Schlatt. If don’t think you can provide him a good life then I’ll find a family who can. Either way, Tubbo gets a chance to live a happy life with a family that loves him. You just have to decide if you’re meant to be that family.” Philza promised, his eyes sincere as he smiled at his friend.

“What if I screw up? What if I fail him?” Schlatt’s voice choked in his throat, swelling with emotion he was fighting desperately hard not to convey. Tubbo fussed in Phil’s arms, still reaching for Schlatt.

“We’re all scared to fail our children, Schlatt. I know I am. Every day I look at my boys and fear that I won’t be good enough. That I won’t be able to protect them or teach them to be strong. I worry that I might lose them one day.” Phil explained and then looked down at Tubbo, “But I also know that every time I look at my sons, I know I would move mountains for them. I see that same look in your eyes now. You’ve already made up your mind. You made it up the moment you saw him.”

“I did.” Schlatt gritted, flinching when Tubbo let out a cry from being ignored.

“Then take him. He’s your son.”

Schlatt gently slid his hands under the child’s arms and lifted him out of Phil’s arms and into his own. Instantly Tubbo stilled and stared at Schlatt. His small hands poked around at his jacket and tugged on his crooked tie before finding their way up to his face. With one hand secure around the baby, the ram’s other came to press against one of Tubbo’s hands.

Tubbo flattened his palm against Schlatt's and the man looked in awe at how his own hand dwarfed the boy's.

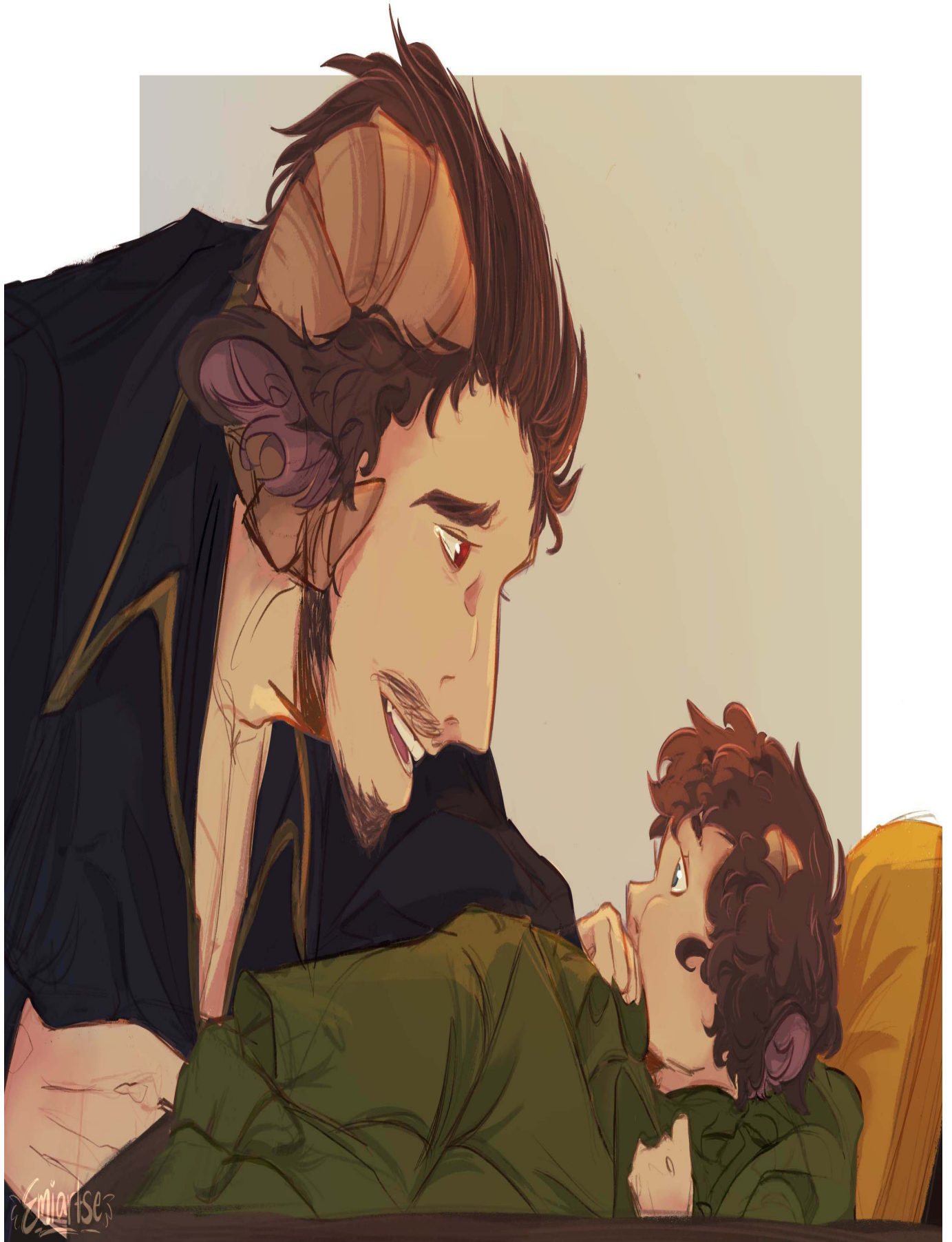
"What's his name? Does he have one already or...?" Schlatt wondered turning back to Phil who had been watching the two with a fond look in his eye. The man cleared his throat and answered, "Tubbo. His name is Tubbo. Bad looked over him when he arrived and guesses he's around six months old."

Tubbo. His son. I have a son.

"Hello, Tubbo," Schlatt said softly and cracked a smile when the baby's small furry ears perked up at the sound of his name. Tubbo smiled back a toothless grin.

"Absolutely perfect," Schlatt murmured when the boy leaned into his shoulder, content to rest in his father's arm after his long journey.

"My perfect Tubbo."



Chapter End Notes

everyone say it with me

DADSCHLATT DADSCHLATT DADSCHLATT

we're nearing the end of the pt. 1 (the prologue that got WAY too long) which means its time for a certain boy to appear.

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed <3

Theseus

Chapter Notes

PROCEED WITH CAUTION FLUFF AHEAD

no trigger warnings this chapter have fun

Word Count: 5.2k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

One Month Later

The feeling of a gentle hand running through his curls is what stirs Wilbur from his slumber. He sighed into the touch and pushed more against the soft hand, wanting more.

Instead, the hand recedes causing Wilbur to whine softly in retaliation.

Open your eyes, my son.

“Kristin?” Wilbur whispered into the darkness and his eyes shoot open, red pinpricks illuminating the dark room faintly. He sat up in his bed and gently unwrapped himself from Techno’s tight grip. The boy looked around for his mother and his eyes furrowed in confusion when he found no trace of her.

Was it just a dream? No, I’m sure it was her.

The door to his room was wide open and the hallway outside was dark. Fear chilled down his spine. That light never turned off. Something was off. Phil promised he’d *always* keep that light on and every night for the past year, he had. Until now.

He turned to Techno and shook his arm, “Tech. Wake up. Something’s wrong.”

The boy didn't stir. A deeply-rooted fear stirred in his chest, reminding him of those last few days in the Nether when Wilbur had to rouse himself awake from his own sickly haze to shake his brother awake. If they stayed asleep for too long, they might never wake up. Nowadays, Techno wasn't exactly a heavy sleeper. Something was very very wrong.

Do not panic, Wilbur. Your brother is simply sleeping. Come find me, my son. I have something to show you.

"But how can I follow what I can't see." Wilbur whimpered into the darkness. He didn't like the dark, he'd never had to deal with it in the Nether. It was scary and you never knew what was lurking within.

Follow the light, Wilbur. Follow the light to me.

As if on cue a wisp of light flickered to life in the center of the room. It glowed a golden yellow and just barely illuminated the floor beneath him. The boy hopped out of his bed and grabbed his sweatshirt that was crumpled on the ground by his feet. He smoothed it over his white nightshirt and hastily slipped his shoes onto his feet on the way out.

Just to be safe, he grabbed the candle from his bedside and lit it just in case the wisp in front of him vanished and left him alone.

Leave the candle, Wilbur. You won't need it. I won't let you become lost.

He sighed but listened to his mother's words and set it back at the bedside for Techno, just in case he ended up waking up after all.

Wilbur tip-toed towards the ball of light and watched in awe as it danced around him. He reached out to try to touch it but the moment he did it dispersed into sparks.

Instantly another took its place but this one was located outside his room. He followed it into the hallway, his red eyes reflecting the golden light it emitted.

For each light he walked to, he would poke it away, giggling when it burst into a gentle rainfall of golden fragments. The farther he made it down the hall the brighter each light glowed.

Eventually, he entered a hallway an area of the castle he wasn't familiar with. But the lights never failed to urge him forward closer and closer to his unknown goal. Finally, the lights came to stop in front of a set of tall spruce doors.

Wilbur watched with fascination in his eyes as the ball changed its shape to fit through the cracks in the door. Wilbur grabbed at the handles and pulled hard. The door was *heavy*, far too heavy for one his size. The wisps seemed to realize this and a few of them grouped together to help the prince open the door.

Eventually, he managed to pry the door about a foot wide and slip inside. The moment he does something magical happened. Multiple wisps morph into long tendrils of light that swirl around him and throughout the room creating ribbons of gold that stem into the center of the room.

All the light caused the room to illuminate before his eyes, making the tall stone walls that structured the room visible. It was a mostly empty chamber with a long green carpet that led to a bed of gold. Wilbur had never seen this place before but it seemed important.

The strings of light swirled in front of him, trying to grab back his attention.

“Okay, Okay. I’m coming.” Wilbur smiled and the light seemed to grin back as it led him to the center of the room.

Ribbons of gold gathered in front of the brunette’s feet before seeping into the ground as water would for a thirsty plant.

And then a golden flower of light sprouts from the floor. It was like no flower Wilbur had ever seen before. There were no tangible petals or stems, except for the geometric shapes the light had bent into.

Wilbur sank to his knees in front of the flower, peering over it curiously. And then he did the first thing any six-year-old would do. He gently touched the flower with his forefinger.

The flower scattered away into the air and Wilbur thought that would be the end until suddenly the room filled with more wisps than the prince had seen yet. They floated around the room and briefly took the form of lanterns that one would send traveling into the air. And then they exploded into a shower of golden fireworks. The remnants crossed in front of the boy and another shape formed in front of him.

This time it was a bird made from fire that emerged from the rays of gold. Hues of red, yellow, and orange made up the bird and its wings which spread for Wilbur as it soared around the room.

No matter how hard he tried though, he couldn't remember the name of the bird.

"I'm sorry. I can't remember what kind of bird you are but you're very pretty Mr. Bird." Wilbur said apologetically and the bird cawed understandingly. The golden bird came to land in front of the prince and once again the boy stretched out his hand.

He was half-piglin after all so he knew he was at least somewhat fireproof. The fire-bird cooed and rubbed against Wilbur's palm before moving to sit in front of him.

Unbeknownst to the prince, the lights had begun swirling around him again. It bloomed around him into the shape of the golden flower once more but this time, Wilbur and the fiery creature made up the center.

The bird looked up at Wilbur and let out an affectionate chirp before it transformed for the last time before his eyes. It wrapped its wings around itself causing its body and head to disappear from sight. Soon enough the wings vanished as well and left something small and fragile on the ground in front of him.

A group of wisps around moved closer to him to help light up the area for the prince to see. And as his vision focused back a cry echoed through the room that caused his voice to catch in his throat.

It was high-pitched and tiny-sounding. But it was still somehow the most beautiful noise Wilbur had ever heard.

It was the cry of a baby.

Sitting in front of Wilbur, wrapped in a soft red blanket was a small infant with bright blue eyes and a head full of golden hair. The blonde was now wailing and this time the noise was a lot less musical and a lot more *loud and annoying*.

Around the baby's neck was a golden chain with a gold pendant that had an eerily familiar diamond-shaped emerald fused to it. Unconsciously Wilbur's hand traveled to his own pointed ear to the single emerald earring that dangled from it. Techno himself had a matching one that hung from his opposite ear to mirror his twin.

It had been Phil's gift to his sons for their sixth birthday. When piglin children are born they are usually given a gold earring at birth. Wilbur had long since thrown his away, but Techno still held onto his, saying that he didn't want to forget where he came from.

It was just one of those things that the two would never see eye-to-eye.

So when they were gifted the expertly crafted earring, Wilbur refused to take his off, deciding to fully attach himself to his new life in the overworld and leave his old painful past in the dust.

Techno had simply asked to get another piercing. He moved his old gold hoop to his lower lobe while the emerald would hang high at the tip of his ear, like Wilbur's.

Wilbur looked down at the baby again and then at the necklace. Surely it wasn't an accident that he had it. It was practically a tradition that only members of the immediate royal family were given emeralds. It was a symbol of their status. For Kristin, it was the emerald in her wedding ring. For Phil, it was the centerpiece of his crown, though he also had one that would dangle off of his signature striped hat.

No, this wasn't an accident. *This baby...is he? Does this mean...?* Wilbur's thoughts raced in his mind as the realization began to sink in.

The brunette leaned forward and scooped the infant securely into his arms. Instantly, the cries ceased their unpleasant melody and the infant stared up at him with a look that was just as curious as Wilbur's.

He was so *tiny*.

Just a little creature whose eyes contrasted his own. Wilbur already knew his own drove would've slaughtered the child on sight. How could something so fragile and defenseless possibly make it in such a world?

An emotion Wilbur was heavily familiar with pooled in his chest as the baby continued to stare at him. The prince pulled back the blanket slightly and freed one of the baby's hands from its swaddle. He gently pressed his own hand against the blonde's and let out a laugh that sounded more like a sob.

The infant managed to free his other hand from its binding and pressed that one to Wilbur's hand as well. One of the hands moved up and tightly wrapped itself around the brunette's thumb.

Finally, he spoke, "Where on Earth did you come from, little guy? Did the bird bring you to me?" Suddenly he furrowed his eyebrows, "Did Kristin bring you to me?"

A bit of golden thread from the side of the baby blanket caught Wilbur's attention. It was carefully stitched in flawless cursive to say a name.

"The-se-us. *Theseus*. Your name is Theseus?" Wilbur asked as if the baby had the ability to answer him back. Instead, Theseus let a wad of spit bubble out of his mouth, causing Wilbur to giggle, "Ew gross!"

Theseus simply gave him an odd-looking smile back. Though to be completely honest, it was probably just gas.

"Well Theseus, my name is Wilbur. Can you say that? *Wil-Bur*?" Theseus simply tugged on Wilbur's hand in response, babbling at the name.

“I guess you’re probably too young for words, that’s okay. Tubbo can’t talk yet either. You’ll like Tubbo I think, he’s like our little cousin. He’s not very fun to play with yet but he will be! And don’t worry Techno and I know lots of baby games we can play until you’re big like us.” Wilbur took a deep breath and smiled,

“I know you can’t really understand me yet but I just want you to know. I’ll keep you safe, Theseus. I promise.”

“Wilbur?!” A voice from outside the door echoed, it was frantic and eerily familiar. He heard shuffling by the door and could see light shining from under the doorway. As if on cue, the wisps vanished from sight leaving him and Theseus in almost total darkness.

“Dad?” Wilbur called out, a bit frightened by the dark as he stood from the ground with Theseus carefully held up in his arms. He shifted up his elbow to gently raise the infant’s head, just like Puffy had shown him for Tubbo.

“Phil! I’m in here!” Wilbur tried again and this time he heard another voice call out, “Idiot, did you get stuck behind the door?”

Techno.

“Come in and find out! I think you’ll like what I found.” Wilbur said smiling down at Theseus, who was shrouded by darkness.

The door opened and light flooded into the room as his father and brother rushed inside. Wilbur quickly concealed Theseus a bit with the blanket so as to not make it overtly obvious what he was holding.

Phil quickly lit the oil lanterns in the room, and the pit in Wilbur’s stomach vanished as the light returned. He stayed with his back turned to him and he spoke,

“ *Wilbur Watson*, I thought I told you. No. I ’ve said it *multiple times!* You cannot go wandering around the castle alone at night. It isn’t safe.”

Wilbur looked up and saw Technoblade staring at him from the doorway with his eyes wide. His gaze specifically focused on the bundle of red fabric curled in his arms. Wilbur motioned him over as Phil continued to scold him.

Techno looked down in wonder at the baby in his brother's arms. Theseus was quick to catch one of Techno's fingers with his hands, holding it just as tightly as he had for Wil.



“I understand wanting to see your friends but you can visit them during the daytime, son. The fact is you could get hurt going out like this at night and I’ve warned you about running off countless times. I’m afraid this time there will be some repercus–”

“Dad, shut up and turn around would you?” Wilbur said rolling his eyes.

“ *Hey no* , take that back. I will not have the first time either of you calls me ‘Dad’ be used to get yourself out of trouble. At least wait for your mother to get he-” Finally Phil cut off as he turned around, his face went white as a sheet as he spotted the bundle in Wilbur’s arms.

The man froze dead in his tracks, staring blankly with an expression Wilbur didn’t quite understand. As quickly as it appeared, it was gone and something warm sparked in his eyes instead. He slowly walked over to the boys and sank to the ground, crossing his legs.

Wilbur turned and sat in his father’s lap, giggling when he felt Phil’s beard tickle against his cheek as the man looked down at Theseus. Techno sat in front of Wilbur, his eyes still refusing to leave the tiny infant.

He heard his father breath out softly to himself, “ *Oh...thank you, my love. He’s perfect.* “

“ Can we keep him?” Techno asked, refusing still to look up.

Phil let out a breathless laugh as he ran his fingers gently through Theseus’s short blonde hair,

“Of course, we can, my son. Of course. Besides, I want to see Puffy and Schlatt’s faces when they see him. It will be *priceless* .” Phil said with a laugh.

“Does this mean he’s our little brother?” Wilbur asked while shifting slightly to secure Theseus in his arms. The baby let out a yawn, seemingly tuckered out from all the attention, though he still continued to look around at everyone.

“Yes, Wilbur. It means he’s your little brother. Which means you both have to look out for him the way you do for each other, okay? Can you promise me that?” Phil asked, his voice serious, but

warm.

“I promise,” Wilbur piped up immediately with a smile, clearly he already adored the infant. Techno, ever the more stoic of his children finally looked up and said firmly, “I promise.”

The pink-haired boy looked down once more and finally noticed the name scrawled on the side of the blanket. A small smile appeared on his face, “Theseus, huh? I like it.”

“Prince Theseus of the Antarctic Empire, younger brother to the heirs to the throne.”

In celebration of the prince’s ‘birth,’ the royal family released a floating lantern into the sky and set off golden fireworks to honor the young prince along with his brothers. A month later, a giant mosaic of the family was erected in the town square, dedicated to the now completed royal family.

The news spread far and wide throughout the kingdom of the arrival of the new prince, and eventually reached the ears of a young mage with short brown hair and large white glasses. The brunette paled as he read the contents of the letter, his heart pounded in his chest as a wave of anxiety washed over him.

It’s beginning.

Finally, after taking a moment to stifle the anxiety in his chest, he gently tucked the letter back into its envelope and rushed from his study. He threw on his boots as he headed out the door to the small training area they had hastily constructed when they’d moved here five years ago.

As he entered the fenced-out area, he saw no sign of his best friend, that was until a chilling voice creep down from the rafters above.

“I heard him. He says the kid has been born.” Dream hissed causing George to raise a brow at the green-eyed blonde. Eventually, he spoke, voice dripping with sarcasm, “I thought you’d be happy about this? I mean it’s not like we haven’t been waiting a thousand years in the dark for this day to arrive.

“I’ll be happier once we’re finally free.” Dream snarled. His eyes softened at George’s frown and he sighed, rubbing the anger from his expression. He hopped down from his perch, barely rustling a leaf as he hit the ground and stalked over to his partner,

“I suppose it was about time anyway. I don’t want to be nearing fifty when we finally finish this.”

“The boy’s healing ability will be strong enough to keep us young. It won’t keep us from aging, but it will slow it down considerably Now stop pouting will you?” Dream proceeded to grimace even more so, causing the brunette to snort back a laugh,

“We still have five years before his markings show anyway, plenty of time for us to secure a base for ourselves where they won’t ever find him. If we play this right, they’ll never even know he was a phoenix at all.” George grinned and wrapped his arm around the taller man.

“Aren’t you ever the clever one, Gogs.” Dream snarked and pushed down his glasses. “Say we wait a few years, what about his memory? The kid is bound to remember something.”

George smacked away his hands and readjusted his glasses, “Relax, I’ve got a plan for that too. Now pack your shit and lets go.”

“You know, he’s not going to break in your arms darling.” His mother’s voice rang softly in his ears as the pink-haired boy hung over his brother’s crib watching as he slept peacefully.

“I know...but I prefer to watch,” Techno murmured into his sleeve and smiled when he felt her hand run through his long unbraided hair.

“Well, you’ve spent about two months watching, how about we try holding him for a change,” Kristin said sweetly, her hands gently sliding under Techno’s underarms and she effortlessly lifted the boy off of the railing and placed him on the floor.

“Kristin, I’m not so su-” Techno began only to be brushed off as she knelt down in front of him.

“Nonsense, there is nothing to be afraid of Techno. You held Tubbo just fine when he arrived, what’s so different about Theseus?”

A pit settled in Techno’s stomach and the boy looked to the floor. He probably would’ve stayed silent if chat hadn’t been incessantly screaming at him.

TELL.

TELL MOTHER.

MUMZAA.

you wont drop kick the child we believe in you.

hold to-theseus

TELL MUMZA

E.

“*Kristin* ?” Techno began, he fiddled nervously with his cufflinks, snapping them in and out of place.

“Yes, Techno?”

“Aren’t you worried I might hurt him? I mean Wil is just a much safer choice than me, y’know? He’s better than I am with Theseus and-” His eyes didn’t leave the ground until a hand under his chin forced his gaze to meet his mother’s bright purple eyes, shining with something akin to horror but not directed at him.

“ *Technoblade Alexander Watson* . Where is this coming from? I know you would *never* hurt Theseus.”

“But...” Techno furrowed his brow, confused, “Isn’t that why you didn’t wake me the day Wilbur found Theseus?”

“What?” Kristin looked equally confused and Techno sighed trying to figure out how to get out what he was trying to say.

“The day Theseus arrived, you woke up Wilbur. *But you didn't wake up me.* I didn't understand why...and for a while, it hurt. *Why did Wilbur get to meet our little brother first? It's not fair.* But then I figured it was because I'm dangerous.”

His mother sunk to her knees and softly held Techno's face within her nimble hands. She brushed back a loose strand of hair, tucking it behind his long pointed ears, and whispered sorrowfully,

“Oh my son, that's not it at all. *I'm so sorry.* I should've realized that you felt left out, I never even thought about it. I'm so so sorry. You are not dangerous, Techno. You are strong, yes, and one day I know you will be a warrior to be feared but that is not the reason I woke Wilbur up and not you. *You are not dangerous and you are not the monster you tell yourself you are.*”

Techno's throat grew tight with emotion and he coughed once, trying to keep his expression blank. And then he realized that he didn't need to. This was Kristin. This was his mother.

Kristin pulled the boy into her arms, weaving her fingers through his hair as she spoke. Techno let himself be held like a toddler, just this once, and rested his head against her shoulder.

“I didn't wake you up because I knew you wouldn't follow.”

Technoblade shot upright, confused, “*Heh?*”

His mother laughed at his expression and untangled a few more knots in his hair with her fingers.

“You're stubborn and cautious like your father. Wilbur could have easily been following a stranger using magic and would've never known the difference. You, on the other hand, would've fought me every step of the way, believing wholeheartedly that it was a trap. That's why I woke you up *after* Wilbur was gone.”

“Because, unlike your brother, you went to get Phil the moment I started leading you down the hall.”

Techno let out a shaky exhale as relief washed over him. It was like a weight had been lifted off of his chest. His mother trusted him. She trusted him even though he knew he was dangerous. She trusted him with the most precious gift Techno had ever received (which is saying a lot considering she also brought him back from the dead.)

Theseus. His little brother. Only four months old and already he was beginning to show the world his fiery personality. He would cry whenever Wilbur put him back in his crib or whenever Techno let go of his hand. He was fascinated to no end by his appearance in the mirror. He'd already developed an attachment to a toy Sam had gifted him, a stuffed cow with a brown and white coat. And just recently, he'd smiled for the first time.

A real smile.

Techno was a bit jealous it hadn't been him Theseus had smiled for.

It was Tubbo that had caused the baby to grin for the first time when the eleven-month-old had tried a game of peek-a-boo with him. Apparently, he'd learned it from Schlatt, not that the ram would ever admit it.

A warm feeling blossomed inside his chest. *He was trusted.*

“So what you're saying is Wilbur is just an idiot?” Techno grinned as he pushed his thoughts aside.

“*No...* Wilbur is very book-smart, but unfortunately when it comes to common sense...” Kristin winced, looking terribly guilty to say it,

“What I'm trying to say is your brother is a bit more... *naïve* than you are.”

“That's just a fancy way of saying he's an idiot.” Techno countered and Kristin shook her head in mock exasperation, “Stop twisting my words, you little gremlin. You and your brothers each share

an equal part of my heart, no one is less or greater than the other.”

“ *You didn’t deny it.* “ Techno sang happily and his mother's expression warped to one of mischief. Before he knew it, Kristin was tickling him mercilessly.

Techno squealed unable to get out of her grasp, but his smile never leaves his face and his laughter never turns to one of pain.

“ *Okay! Okay! You win! I take it back! Mom...! I take it back!* “ The hands disappear and Techno inhales as his chest stops spasming. He sits up and finds his mother grinning ear to ear, tears shining in her eyes.

“ You called me ‘Mom’. That’s the first time you’ve...” Kristin inhaled shakily, eyes still shining. Suddenly her expression is playful once more, “ *I win the bet.* “

“What bet?” Techno ears perk up with curiosity. Kristin stands to her feet and hoists Techno into her arms despite, his half-hearted complaints.

Kristin laughs, joyfully and presses a kiss to her son’s temple, “Your father and I had a bet over who you would call ‘Mom or Dad’ to first. And I just won.”

“You guys gambled over my affection?” Techno said in a mock offended tone. In truth, it meant a lot to him that they cared so much for him.

“Schlatt, Puffy, and Sam placed bets as well,” Kristin said wincing.

“So who did they think would win?” Techno tried his best to look truly offended, even crossing his arms to sell it even further. But alas, Wilbur was the one who was better at theatrics. A wobbly smile involuntarily spread across his face and Kristin beamed.

“That’s a secret, but let's just say Tubbo’s going to be spoiled rotten.”

Suddenly the sound of incoherent baby noises pulls their attention away from their conversation and Techno smiles when he sees Theseus staring at him from his crib.

Somehow he'd managed to roll over from his back onto his stomach and was gripping at the bars on the crib. Techno leaned over to the side to look at Theseus upside down, which was apparently something he found hilarious.

"Hi, Theseus." Techno giggled and then winced when Chat began collectively 'Awing' Theseus's laughter at the same time. The baby stuck his hand out of the crib, reaching for him.

Techno smiled and went to sit on the floor by the crib. He stuck his hand up to the bars and felt warmth pool in his chest when his little brother instantly grabbed it.

He weaved his free hand through the bars and into Theseus's hair, brushing out the golden curls delicately with his fingers. His eyes softened when Theseus moved closer to the edge of the crib, trying to get closer to him.

"He wants you to hold him, Techno." Kristin said softly and suddenly the feeling was back. The horrible, gnawing feeling in his gut that he could hurt him. He was so small and delicate, like a glass bird in his hands.

"I can't. *I can't do it.*" Techno shook his head, his expression crumbling like dust. Kristin let out a hum and walked over to the crib. She gently gathered Theseus in her arms and lifted him from the crib. Then, she knelt on the floor beside Techno.

"Bend your arms inward a bit and lift up your arms. I won't let anything bad happen, just trust me ok?" His mother's voice was so soft, so reassuring, and so loving at that moment. Finally, Techno let out a breath and nodded before positioning himself. He crossed his legs and stretched out his shaky hands.

Kristin gently set Theseus in his arms and then moved so that her arms were under his to support him. Techno went stiff as a rod the moment he felt Theseus, fear bubbling up again.

Chat to his complete shock immediately erupted into cheers and praises before quieting down again as not to overwhelm him.

“Relax, Technoblade. He’s not glass, he’s not going to shatter in your arms. Take a deep breath and relax.” Kristin murmured, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

Inhale. Exhale. Release the tension. Repeat.

Theseus simply stared at him, smiling at his brother. His hands reached up and tugged at the white streak of hair that normally fell in front of his face.

“Ow,” Techno said calmly if not a bit uncomfortably, but didn’t dare move to pry Theseus’s hands from his hair.

Instead, Techno finally let his arms relax and shifted Theseus’s head a bit higher. His other hand rested at the baby’s side, keeping him steady.

Eventually, Kristin pulled her hands away when Techno grew more confident. She scooted back a bit and smiled at her sons.

“See? You’re a natural.” She grinned.

“Whose a natural?” A voice rang from the doorway and both of them turned to see Phil and Wilbur peering in at them curiously. Both of them had been out for the day looking for a guitar for Wilbur to begin practicing on. He’s been begging Phil for weeks for one and Phil had finally caved.

It wasn’t because it was expensive or anything like that. Phil hadn’t gotten him one yet because as he put it, “Wilbur needs to prove to me that he’s responsible enough to care for the instrument and not treat it as a toy he can play with for a few weeks and then ditch.”

Which in Wilbur’s case, was a valid argument.

The two filed into the room and Phil’s face lit up at the sight of Techno, “Well look at you, mate. Your mother is right, you are a natural.” Phil grinned and then knelt down next to his wife,

wrapping an arm around her shoulder.

Wilbur was positively beaming as well and happily crouched down next to his brother, leaning his head into Techno's shoulder, "See? I told you, nothing to worry about."

"Phil, guess what?" Kristin said, her tone sugary sweet, and Techno could sense the mischief a mile away. *This ought to be good.*

"Yes, dear?" Phil turned to her with a smile and all the love in the world shining in his blue eyes.

"Techno, sweetheart. Do you mind saying what you said earlier for your father?" Kristin grinned evilly and Phil visibly paled as the realization kicked in.

"Of course, I would, *Mom.*" Techno said flatly but made sure to enunciate the last word.

Philza groaned in defeat, burying his face in his hands while Kristin burst into laughter. Wilbur was holding his stomach as he cackled loudly into Techno's shoulder at his father's defeated expression. Even Techno was having difficulty holding in his laughter.

He instead looked down at Theseus's own expression as the infant looked at his family curiously.

After a moment of playful bickering, Kristin leaned against her angel's side and said triumphantly,

"Looks like he's a Mama's boy after all."

Chapter End Notes

Did it take 28k words to get to Tommy?
Yes.

Do I regret it?
HELL NO

Consider following me on Instagram if you liked the art for this chapter (@_emiartse)
Please leave a comment if you enjoyed<3

Oh Could I Be the Sky

Chapter Notes

Bit of a shorter chapter today but I promise the next one will not be. I had to cut it early because of timeskips and pacing lol

TW: Implied Child Abuse, Blood, uhm body gore? kinda???

Word Count: 3.8k

This chapter was beta-read by my friend @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A young boy crouched underneath a makeshift shelter he had made from rotted wood and trained his eyes on the trashcan a few feet ahead.

Flurries of snow fell against him as the sun began to set behind the horizon. The pain of the frozen water burning his skin was worth seeing the sunset, even if it was shrouded by stormy clouds.

His stomach growled harshly and he let out a whimper. His arms circled around himself as the rumbling settled and the pain subsided.

Just a little longer. They dump out their trash an hour after closing. Hold out a little longer. He tells himself.

The boy reached into the back pocket of his muddied jacket that kept him from freezing to death to warm up his numb fingers. He needed to find better shelter before the snowstorm hit the kingdom. Otherwise, it wouldn't be long until he was another orphan frozen to death on the side of the street.

A clanging sound startled the boy and he scurried back into the corner as much as he could. He decided after a moment to risk a look. He spotted a headful of pink hair and knew it was her. The baker's apprentice, who every night would take the trash out to the nearby bins. Every now and then her older brother would be with her if there was a particularly heavy load.

He liked those days, it meant more food.

He waited for the sound of the lid to slam back down onto the bin and was about to risk another look when he heard her soft voice.

“I have something for you. It’s a lot tastier than half-burned bread loaves and stale pastries.”

His long ears perked up and his tail coiled around his ankle with anxiety. The boy swallowed and then slowly moved into view. His bare feet crunched in the freshly fallen snow and he cowered back against the fence when she stepped closer.

“It’s okay, I’m not gonna hurt you. *I want to help you.* Both my brother and I,” her voice was soothing, but she didn’t step closer. The boy spotted the older brother with a basket of biscuits in his hands a few yards behind her. The boy’s stomach growled once more as he faintly detects the smell of freshly made bread.

His two-toned hair fell in front of his eyes as he spoke with a trembling voice.

“I’m a *freak*, you don’t want to help me. Please, I won’t go through your trash again. Just don’t tell on me. I don’t want to go back,” the child whimpered, tears spilling over, burning his cheeks.

“You’re not a freak, kid. And we won’t let anyone hurt you. We just want to help. You’ll freeze to death if you stay out here any longer.” The brother said, his red and blue glasses glinting the setting sun back at him.

“They already hurt me. They beat me. They maimed me. They called me an abomination. I don’t know what it means, but it sounds bad.” The child wept freely now and hissed out in pain as his cheeks began to bleed.

“Let us help you. We can take care of you, my brother and me. The baker won’t mind, he likes having more workers that he doesn’t have to pay,” the girl pleaded, her hands reaching out to the child.

“Why would you help someone like me?”

“Because you’re just a little kid and you deserve a warm home and a family. Let us be your family. You don’t deserve to die out here in the cold,” said the brother, who was now standing next to his sister.

This is my only chance, it’s either life or death. I’ll die if I leave.

The boy made his choice and ran into the girl’s arms, who was startled at first, but then quickly melted into the hug. The brother ruffled his hair affectionately as the sister knelt down in front of him to gently press her sleeves to his cheeks, trying to stop the bleeding.

She smiled and asked, “What’s your name?”

The boy pulled back and looked up at the girl before weakly replying.

“My name is Ranboo.”

“Look, all I’m saying is, putting a wall around the main kingdom isn’t a bad idea. It’ll keep people who live on the outskirts of town feeling safe.”

“It’ll piss people off is what’ll do, Phil. It’ll feel more like a cage than a kingdom.” Schlatt argued, resting his feet on his desk as he reclined back in his chair. Phil sighed and threw a pen at him, which Schlatt caught easily.

“We don’t have to put the wall in close sight, we can extend it into the forest and have it wrap around the mountain. Out of sight, out of mind,” Phil countered and Schlatt huffed before turning around in his seat to face him directly.

“This is normally the kind of tyrannical idea I would suggest, it’s not like you to want to tighten the reins. What’s the matter?”

Phil looked down at his desk at the portrait of his sons that he’d recently received as a father’s day gift. His eyes landed on his youngest son. *He’ll be turning four soon. That’s the age he was in the vision.*

“It’s nothing. I just feel like we should fortify our defenses, is all.” The lie burned in his chest and he grimaced.

“If you’re gonna lie to me, you could at least look me in the eyes while you’re doing it,” Schlatt said coldly.

“I just-“

“Papa!” A voice called out from the doorway and both men turned to see a mop of golden curls and bright blue eyes peering inside the room.

“Push harder, Tubbo!” Theseus said, giggling.

Another voice whined back. “Then help me! The door is heavy.”

Schlatt chuckled as he heard the boys grunt with effort as the two together successfully pushed open the spruce door.

The toddlers stumbled their way into the office and Phil’s eyes softened as his youngest barreled himself at full speed into his arms. Phil pulled him up and held him one-handed on his hip.

Meanwhile, Tubbo bee-lined straight for his own father and climbed up the chair into his lap. The young ram giggled and leaned back against him. His head tilted back and he looked up at Schlatt with big dark blue eyes and loudly whispered, “Why are you and Uncle Phil fighting?”

Phil walked to the other side of his desk and leaned on it with Theseus still in his arms and assured, “We’re not fighting, Tubbo. Your father and I are just butting heads a bit over work. It’s nothing to worry about.”

Tubbo's eyes widened and he turned to his father in shock. “*You head-butted the Emperor?*”

Phil and Schlatt looked at each other for a comically long moment and Phil felt the tension between them crumble away as they broke down into laughter.

A hand ruffled against the young ram’s hair as the older man explained, “It’s just a figure of speech, son. I promise I haven’t assaulted his Majesty...yet.”

Philza shook his head in mock exasperation but Schlatt could see the fondness leaking through his expression. The winged man turned to his young son, who was fiddling with a heart-shaped brooch on his collar.

“What’s this one mean, Papa?” Theseus asked, his eyes wide with the most beautiful shade of sky blue.

“This is the one your mother gave me for our fifth anniversary,” Philza said with a smile and Theseus’s grin grew. Finally, after a moment he gasped, “Oh! I forgot! Techno sent me in here! He said Wilby’s---”

A scream tore through the cheerful mood and Philza’s head snapped up, his eyes went wide with terror as he instantly recognized the owner of the voice.

Wilbur.

“Was that...” Schlatt began but Phil was already out the door with Theseus clinging to his neck. The ram followed after, throwing Tubbo over his shoulder like a sack of flour.

“Wil. *Wil!*” Techno sobbed as his twin crushed his hand in his grip. The boy was writhing on the floor, his glasses lay cracked on the ground a few feet ahead from where they’d fallen on his face. Wilbur’s free hand clutched at the back of his own shirt, tearing the fabric away.

Techno’s breath caught in his throat at the sight of his back. There was...there was something *moving* in his brother’s back.

His own back ached and fear trilled down his spine. *This is going to happen to me too.*

“Tech...please...*make it stOP!!*” Wilbur cut off with another cry of pain as whatever was in his back tried to escape once again.

“*I don’t know how!* I don’t know what to do!” Techno cried. He used his free hand to tear away the rest of his shirt so his full back was exposed.

“*Oh, gods.*” Techno’s face went white as a sheet.

“Boys!” A voice cried and suddenly the door was flung open with his father and little brother running inside. There was a faint noise outside as Schlatt waved off the guards who had rushed over, concerned by the prince’s scream.

Techno could hear Theseus’s little voice call out amidst Wilbur’s muffled screams. “Wil...bur?” His eyes were wide with terror.

And then suddenly, he was holding the blond boy in his arms and being pushed away from his brother as his father took over.

“Wilbur,” Philza began, his hands light grazing over his spine. They trailed down to his marking. A mark that appeared on every child’s fifth birthday, signifying whether or not they’d get wings and from where they’d emerge. Both Wilbur and Techno had one.

But instead of two markings on each child, they each only had one. Wilbur had one on his left shoulder, while Techno had one on his right.

It was a common wing deformity among volantes to only be born with one wing. Phil had just hoped since Kristin had been the reason they'd gotten wings in the first place.

He had really hoped his sons would've been able to fly like him.

Phil shook himself from his thoughts. *This was no time to feel sorry for himself.*

"Alright. Alright, it's your wing, mate. It's trying to come out." Philza explained, running his fingers through his hair trying to soothe the crying ten-year-old.

"It hurts, Dad. Make it stop." Wilbur sobbed. Philza used his sleeve to wipe away a few tears.

"I'm gonna pick you up and then I'm going to take you to Bad, alright mate? He's gonna help you get that wing out and everything will feel so much better after that, I promise."

Wilbur nodded and yelped when Phil lifted him up. The boy hooked his arms around his father's shoulders and prayed unconsciousness would take him at some point.

As they ran down the hall, each jostle felt like someone ripping his spine out of his back. It was beyond excruciating.

It was hell.

He could feel his wing muscle prod at the marking on his back, noticing that there was significantly less resistance in that spot in particular.

Wilbur gritted his teeth and squeezed his eyes shut as he felt the first break in his skin.

"Dad!" Wilbur yelled, his nails digging into his father's shoulder. "I can't keep it inside. It's tearing its way out."

“It’s okay, Wil. Just let it happen. It’s okay if your wing emerges in the hallway, all we care about is that it breaks out, alright? It’s very dangerous otherwise.” Phil murmured into his son’s brunette curls.

The stairs were the final straw for Wilbur, the jostling proved too much and with one final wail, he felt a sharp crack of bone and skin as his wing fell out of his back.

“It’s over, Wil! It’s over. It’s out. *You did it.*” His father praised tearfully as they finally made it to Bad’s clinic.

“Oh, dear.” A warped voice chirped out and Wilbur’s vision danced as he turned his head to look at the demon who had hastily gotten up from his chair and rushed over to them.

Suddenly there was another pained cry. Wilbur spun his head back to where Schlatt was holding up Techno with his free hand underneath his shoulder. His twin’s knees had apparently given out beneath him, sending both him and Theseus tumbling to the ground.

Theseus seemed fine though, the toddler quickly bounced back to his feet and hurried back to Techno’s side with tears streaming down his rosy cheeks. Tubbo seemed to notice his father’s struggle and quickly maneuvered himself onto Schlatt’s back. With his other hand now free, Schlatt lowered Techno to a sitting position on the floor.

“*Shit,*” Phil swore and handed Wilbur off to Bad, who quickly laid the prince prone against one of the many beds lined up in the room. He moved his newly emerged wing, which wasn’t nearly as large as it had felt moving around in his skin, and centered it against his back. Once that was done, he went over to help Techno, whose own wing was beginning to burst from his back.

With all the adults surrounding the boy, Theseus had been pushed to the side. But once he was sure Techno was going to be alright, he bolted over to Wilbur’s side.

The nearly four-year-old boy was barely tall enough to see over the edge of the mattress, so he grabbed a nearby chair and grunted with exertion as he dragged it over to the edge of the bed.

Wilbur's vision was hazy as the adrenaline began to fade from his body, leaving him exhausted. But he smiled as he felt his little brother's weight dip the mattress ever so slightly as he climbed up onto the bed.

He was careful not to touch his wing as he shimmied up the bed to curl up against Wilbur's side. The toddler was dangerously close to the edge of the bed so Wilbur clenched his jaw and tried to ignore the searing bursts of pain that shot down from his shoulder all that way to his fingertips as he moved his arm slowly to circle around the boy's waist, securing him.

Theseus whimpered when Techno let out another scream of pain and Wilbur buried his face into his curls. His words slurred sleepily as he spoke, "S'alright Theseus. Techno's tough, remember?"

Theseus nodded into his side and Wilbur could feel dampness against his shirt. He ruffled his hair and pressed a kiss to the top of his head.

"Tell me, what does my wing look like?" Wilbur asked after a moment. He needed to keep Theseus distracted for as long as he could.

The blonde poked his head up carefully and looked over Wilbur's back. After a moment he spoke, "It's all covered in...uhm..." Theseus trailed off for a moment, scrunching up his brow in distress.

After a moment he continued. "But it looks kinda like Papa's wings. Oh! You have blue and black feathers, Wil! The top half is black and the bottom half is blue."

"Heh, neat," Wilbur mumbled and looked at his brother's tear-stained face. He carefully ran the back of his hand against his cheek and whispered, "Don't cry, Theseus. I want to see you smile, okay? We're gonna be okay."

A horrible cracking sound sent Theseus scrambling back into his side, causing the brunette to wince. Wilbur looked over at his twin. All he could really see was a mop of pink hair slumped over in his father's arms. He squinted and silently wished he still had his glasses, but he could just barely make out a small red and black wing jutting out of his brother's back.

His gaze fell over to Schlatt, who was holding Tubbo tightly against his chest. Every now and then he could see the toddler's shoulders shake as he wept into his father's shirt.

The ram locked eyes with Wilbur and he gently pressed a hand comfortingly against Phil's shoulder before standing. He walked over to the bed next to the two boys and used his legs to push the bed against Wilbur's.

Schlatt gently set Tubbo next to Theseus and shook his head when his son looked back up at him confused, "Just for a little bit. I need to help Phil, okay?"

Tubbo nodded and settled into the bed next to his cousins.

He ruffled the hair on his son's head and turned to see Phil with a now passed-out Technoblade in his arms. Schlatt stepped aside so the winged man could lay his son down on the bed in a way that mirrored Wilbur's own position.

Once the boy was settled, Phil practically fell into an empty chair, though he was careful to tuck his wings into his back before he sat on them.

Schlatt always thought it was odd that wings as big as Phil's could still be neatly folded back into himself.

Forget "odd," it's was fucking *weird*. It reminded Schlatt of object permanence and babies. How if you hid your face behind your hands, the kid would think you've vanished into thin air. And looking at Phil with his wings hidden in his back as if he'd never had them in the first place? Well, needless to say, he understood how one-year-old Tubbo had felt a little better.

In reality, it was some kind of weird mutant magic winged folk had acquired over centuries of being hunted down by poachers or as Puffy called them, "Angel-hunters." The short version of the myth was that a group of volantes pleaded with a mage to grant them a cloaking spell for their wings. The mage had shown mercy to them after seeing their dwindling population suffer. They created a spell that could allow volantes to hide their wings by temporarily causing the wings to return to their original state of being tucked away in their backs as all children had before the age of ten.

Then, when the wings needed to be summoned it was as easy as flexing a muscle to cause them to grow out once more both painlessly and quickly. The trade-off was, that the longer the wings stayed

in one's back the more uncomfortable they would become over time. And if someone forcibly kept their wings in for an extended period of time, there could be dangerous repercussions.

Over time, the spell eventually mutated into volant DNA and now almost all people born with wings could hide their wings this way. Though why Phil could also do it despite having been around before the spell was created was a mystery.

Suddenly a damp rag was being thrown in Schlatt's direction. He caught it just barely and directed a half-annoyed glance to Bad who grinned apologetically.

"You know how to clean avian wings, right?" The doctor asked, already beginning to gently run the cloth over Wilbur's newly emerged feathers.

Phil snorted from the other side of the room and Schlatt rolled his eyes, knowing damn well what he was recalling.

Long story short, the Emperor had been outside playing with his sons in the rain and covered his wings in mud. It had taken hours for him and Puffy to get it all out.

"Unfortunately yes, I do," Schlatt answered, shooting a glare at the Emperor. Phil laughed and hopped back up to his feet, taking Bad's rag from him. The demon began to protest but Phil cut him off.

"Schlatt and I can work on cleaning their wings while you can get some medicine prepared for them?"

Bad nodded his head diligently, he'd always been overly formal towards Phil, despite the Emperor's best efforts to get the uptight demon to refer to him more casually. However, the doctor was simply a stickler for formalities.

"Yes, majesty. They'll be in pain for a little while and a bit wobbly as well. New wings, especially just one, can cause a great shift in balance. Unfortunately, that is just the reality of only one wing emerging."

“How will that affect my fighting?” Techno’s frail voice suddenly piped up and all three men turned to see the boy staring at them, eyes filled with anxiety.

“You don’t need to wor–” Bad began, his hands fluttering as he spoke.

“*Don’t lie to me, Bad!*” Techno barked and Phil scolded back, “Techno! Do not yell at the doctor, I taught you better than that.”

“Sorry,” Techno mumbled before hiding his face into Tubbo’s curls. The tiny ramling had abandoned Theseus, who was firmly attached to Wilbur. Instead, he curled up next to Techno, who wasn’t normally overly fond of hugs.

“I’ll be transparent with you, your Highness. It’ll be a struggle at first. You’ll have to adjust to the new weight of the wing and relearn how to balance yourself. But with time and practice, I have no doubt you’ll be able to best some of the guards within the year.”

Techno snorted at that, but the tension in his expression lessened. Satisfied with that answer, he let his eyes flutter shut once more. Or at least he would have if Tubbo hadn’t suddenly shot upright, causing Techno to shiver at the sudden coldness.

“Tubbo?” Techno mumbled, looking at the boy oddly. Tubbo ignored him and turned to look at Techno’s wing, his eyes grew thoughtful. The toddler placed his hand under his chin and furrowed his brow, it was an awfully cute sight. He looked up at his father who had begun work on cleaning Techno’s wing and grinned,

“What if you made Techno and Wil a prosthesis-ick?”

“A what?” Techno gaped, completely lost at what he meant.

Tubbo looked mildly annoyed but tried again, “Like Ponk’s arm! He’s got a metal one.”

“Oh a *prosthetic*,” Phil laughed and soaked his rag in the bowl, “They don’t make those for wings, Tubbo. Everything prosthetic I’ve seen is either too stiff or too fragile to fly with. It just is not

achievable yet.”

Tubbo looked heartbreakingly disappointed for a moment before a wide smile formed on his face. The boy wrung his hands almost excitedly and proclaimed, “Then I’ll be the first one to ackeeve it.”

“It’s *achieve*, Tubso.” Wilbur muttered before falling back asleep, Phil smiled and ruffled his son’s hair.

Phil looked back at Tubbo and he wanted to laugh, but to be honest he was more impressed than anything. Tubbo is four and wants to engineer wings?

He turned to Schlatt with an incredulous look and asked, “*What the hell kind of bedtime stories are you reading this kid?*”

“His favorite at the moment is *"The Principles of Physics."*



Chapter End Notes

Sorry if the cut-off seemed awkward, I absolutely had to break this part of the chapter from the other because of all the POV shifts and time-hopping. But we are almost there you guys. I know this was all originally supposed to be an intro but let's call this arc Part I.

Ranboo? In my story? Its more likely than you think.

I really wanted to get you guys used to the way I write everyone's relationship as much as I could before...yknow. Also, I have way too much fun world-building. And no, I have not forgotten about the egg lmao.

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed follow me on Insta (@_emiartse) for updates and art for the fic!

On The Fourth of July

Chapter Notes

TW for this Chapter: Major Character Injury

Word Count: 7,800

This chapter was beta read by my friend @soulswhimmer (@arbitersart) <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Wil, why is Mum always gone?” Theseus asked one day. The twins froze and synchronically put down their classwork for the day to look at their nearly five-year-old brother.

The three were currently all sitting in the library. Techno and Wilbur were set up at the table closest to the fireplace while Theseus was on the floor next to them playing with his toys. The blonde fiddled with the chain of his necklace as he spoke. “Do we make her mad?”

Wilbur’s eyes widened and he stumbled from his chair and down to the floor with Techno following closely behind, “No, Theseus, no. Mum loves us very much, you know that.”

Theseus's chin wobbled and he scrunched up his face. He used the sleeve of his shirt to wipe tears from his eyes.

“Mom isn’t like most people, Theseus. She’s special,” Techno explained and pulled the boy into his lap. Theseus grumbled for a moment before eventually yielding and settling in his brother’s arms.

“She has a job that is very important and because of that, she can only see us once a week,” Wilbur added.

“What’s more important than us?” Theseus argued and the twins looked at each other nervously. Eventually, Wilbur shrugged and looked down at Theseus pointedly.

Theseus hated when they did that. *How can you have a conversation without talking?* It made very little sense to him.

“Theseus, do you know why Wilbur and I each have a white streak in our hair?” Techno asked and rested his chin atop Theseus’s.

The blonde shook his head.

“Our mum is a very special person. She and Dad have been around for a really long time. When Techno and I were little we got very very sick. So sick that we...*died*.” Wilbur winced at the word and carefully examined his brother’s reaction.

All he got was confusion.

“But dead people don’t come back? How could you have died if you’re here?”

“It was because Mum brought us back, Theseus. Our mother is the Goddess of Death.”

“I don’t...I don’t understand.” Theseus looked distraught now and Wilbur bit the inside of his cheek, searching for any kind of a response that a four-year-old could understand. Thankfully Techno answered for him,

“When Mom isn’t here, it’s because she’s working. Her job is to guide people who die to their Afterlife among other things. When Wilbur and I died, she saw us. She saw us and she brought us back to Phil.”

“Did I die too?” Theseus asked and Wilbur smiled, shaking his head.

“No Theseus, you didn’t die. You were a gift. We don’t know exactly how Mum got you or how you were created, but you were a gift. And one day, I believe you’ll be the first one of us to fly.”

“Don’t be silly, Wilby. I can’t fly. I don’t even have markings!” Theseus rolled his eyes, his previous distress forgotten.

“True, but I think you’ll get them.” Wilbur’s gaze is soft and he gently reaches for Theseus’s pendant. He lets loose the chain a bit and allows the emerald to dangle in front of the boy’s face, “This was with you the day you arrived, that’s how I know.”

“You make no sense.” Theseus shoved the boy away playfully and Wilbur responded by grabbing the child by his ankle and hoisting him into the air.

“Put me down! I’ll bite you, bitch!” Theseus squealed through his laughter.

Techno grinned, “Alright idiots, it’s about time we go bother Dad until he plays with us. Don’t you think?”

Theseus’s eyes sparkled and as he swung upside down by his ankle he used his arms to elbow Wilbur in the stomach, forcing him to drop him.

“Motherfu-” Wilbur cursed.

The child narrowly avoided slamming his headfirst into the ground thanks to Techno, who somehow managed to catch him. Theseus was quickly set on the ground and the boy stumbled up to his feet.

He grabbed the pink-haired boy by the arm and began tugging him forward, “C’mon Tech! We gotta run before Wilbur’s ugliness infects us all and we die.”

“We’re identical twins, Theseus,” Techno said in a mildly offended tone but allowed himself to be dragged off by his little brother.

Later that week...

“Mum, I don’t wanna wear it. It’s *itchy*.” The almost five-year-old boy whined as his mother fiddled with the buttons on his coat. He was wearing his formal prince attire, which was a suit made up of different shades of blue and white with a red belt and red gloves to accentuate it. His silver crown sat snug on his head and Theseus was determined to complain about everything at this point.

Kristin gently brushed back his curls and spoke, “It’s a ball, Theseus. As the royal family, we have to keep up appearances. Which includes even the youngest member of our family.”

“But Tubbo doesn’t have to wear it!” Theseus exclaimed and Kristin chuckled as she straightened the crown on his head, “Tubbo isn’t royalty, darling, but he still will be wearing a suit. It’s just not as fancy as yours.”

Kristin picks up the red cloak that Theseus had fitfully thrown down on the ground earlier and fastens it around the four-year-old’s shoulders.

“I need you to be good tonight, Theseus. Your father is meeting with some very important people from our Eastern border and he needs to not be worried about you and Tubbo wreaking havoc all night. Can you promise me you’ll be good and listen to your brothers?”

Theseus thought on it for a moment while rocking on the balls of his feet. Finally, he nodded, “I’ll be good.”

Kristin pressed a kiss to his cheek and smiled, “That’s my sweet boy. Now go see if your brothers are ready while I check on your father.”

The boy practically bounced out of his parent’s room and ran down the hall at full speed to the room he shared with his brothers. Phil had asked them once if they were ready to get separate rooms but Techno shrugged and said, “Theseus is scared of the dark and clingy and Wilbur has been glued to my side since the day we were born. They’ll just end up back in my room anyway.”

Theseus had then proceeded to kick him for calling him clingy.

He entered his room, nearly stumbling over a pair of dress shoes that were haphazardly tossed in front of the doorway, and shouted, “Mum wants to know if you’re ready!”

His brothers were dressed in attire similar to his own, suits with shades of blue and white and the smallest touch of red. Wilbur’s hair was as messy as usual, but he’d still manage to style it around the simple golden circlet crown he wore that was identical to Techno’s.

“Alright, no need to make it known to everyone in L’manburg, Thes,” Wilbur answered back, wincing at the volume, “I’m almost ready, I just can’t seem to—”

Techno walked over from the other side of the room where Theseus’s bed was and batted away Wilbur’s hands from his tie. “Let me, you always do it wrong.”

“*I do not-*” Wilbur argued back.

“You do too, now shush.” Techno mimicked and effortlessly tied his cravat. The pink-haired boy turned to Theseus, checking him over for any imperfections in his outfit. He frowned, “Theseus. Where is your necklace?”

The boy looked down and pressed his hand to his chest. His eyes widened when his fingers didn’t meet the familiar metal chain.

“I-I...I had it last night when I went to bed, what...?” Theseus panicked and began searching around the room.

“How did you lose it?! You never take the thing off!” Wilbur exclaimed and Theseus whimpered as he looked underneath his bed.

“I don’t know! I had it on earlier! Don’t yell at me!” Theseus spat back angrily.

Techno sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose with his fingers.

“It’s fine, we can look for it later after the banquet. Just...if Mom or Dad asks, say you didn’t want to lose it at the ball so you left it here.”

“But...I- I...never take it off! I don’t wanna go to this stupid ball without it.” Theseus’s eyes welled up with tears and Wilbur’s expression softened. He walked over to the boy and hoisted him into his arms, letting the blonde bury his face into his shoulder.

“It’s alright, Thes. We’ll find it when we get back. Techno and I will even help you look, just don’t cry, okay?” Wilbur said, gently rubbing circles into his back.

“Okay...” Theseus said, his voice breaking slightly. He looked up from Wilbur's shoulder and saw Techno looking at him with a soft expression. The pink-haired boy smiled and straightened the crown on his head before using the back of his hand to gently wipe away the rest of the tears on his little brother's face.

“Are your highnesses ready or-*oh*.” A voice from the doorway caused the three to turn to see the Captain, dressed to the nines in her uniform.

“We’ll be there in a second, Puff. Wait for us?” Wilbur said sheepishly, still hugging the boy tight in his arms.

“That is my job, isn’t it?” Puffy grinned and then walked off.

Once she was gone, Wilbur set Theseus back on the ground and smoothed out the boy's jacket with his hands. He knelt by him, and smiled, “Balls aren’t so bad once you’ve been to them a few times. Sure, they’re filled with stuck-up adults but there is fun to be found if you know where to look.”

Theseus didn’t miss the mischief in his brother’s expression.

“Your Graces, it is a pleasure to introduce to you my wife, Kristin, and our sons, Wilbur, Technoblade, and Theseus,” Philza said amicably.

Theseus clung to Techno’s arm as his father introduced them to the men and the boy took the time to look around the golden ballroom in front of him. The room was illuminated almost solely by windows made from dark oak with gold borders embedded in where the glass met wood. People crowded the large room, some were eating while others danced. Some were drinking a funny purple liquid that Theseus remembered Schlatt liked to have sometimes.

The ceilings were high and had a dark oak archway. There was one large gold and glass chandelier that hung in the center of the room that Theseus had spotted Foolish looking at quite disdainfully. The young prince looked down at his feet and noticed he could see his reflection in the brown checkered vinyl floors. He smiled at himself and shifted his crown off-center.

Techno quickly centered it back much to Theseus’s displeasure.

The two men in front of them bowed politely back and the tall one with dark hair and a fancy mustache spoke first, “The pleasure is all mine, your majesty. What a lovely family you have.”

“Indeed, you must be very proud,” said the other, the shorter man with blond hair. His wings fluttered behind his back as he spoke and Theseus peered over to look at them more closely.

They reminded him of parrot wings with all the pretty colors. Though as he looked closer, he found the flaw. *There is always a flaw.*

The primary feathers on his right wing were missing, making flight an impossibility.

The duke seemed to notice the boy’s curiosity and smiled warmly, “They grew in that way, unfortunately. Nothing to be done about it. Would you like to see them?”

Theseus nodded timidly, but the duke-*Grian* was his name- knelt down and allowed the boy to walk behind him to see his tri-colored wings more closely.

“I hope I grow wings like yours, they’re pretty,” Theseus said, instantly winning over the hearts of everyone in the room. Wilbur gave him a smug half-smile.

“Thank you, your highness, I’m sure you’ll have the best wings of us all.” Grian stood back to his feet and Phil carried on the conversation until the music began. He gently took Kristin’s hand in his own and excused himself.

“Alright gentlemen, we can talk more later, but for now, I’m going to go dance with my wife.”

The men nodded and bowed before walking off to mingle into another conversation. Theseus watched happily as his father led his mother to the dance floor. His smile only grew when he noticed other pairs begin to join them on the floor. Suddenly his brother grabbed his arm, “C’mon Theseus, let’s join the party.”

“But I don’t know how to dance?” Theseus laughed but Wilbur shrugged and said, “You can dance on my feet, it’ll be fun.”

“Tech, you coming?” Wilbur asked, his hand wrapped around Theseus’. The boy shook his head and fiddled with the intricate braid his hair had been put into for the ball. “Nah, I’m claustrophobic enough as it is already, you two have fun though.”

Wil nodded back and began to pull Theseus to the dance floor. People thankfully saw the two princes and quickly made room for them. Theseus gently stepped onto his brother’s shoes and leaned back a bit. And then when the music started up a new song, the two joined in.

It wasn’t exactly *graceful* but it was a cute enough sight that nobody questioned the few times Theseus accidentally slipped off his brother’s shoes and stumbled. It didn’t matter, Theseus loved it.

At one point in the dance, Theseus turned and just barely caught their father looking back at them smiling. The blonde grinned back and giggled, waving his hand to his parents who instantly waved back before turning back to one another. Suddenly someone behind his father caught the boy’s eye and his laughter died in his throat.





A man dressed in dark robes stood ominously at the edge of the dance floor. He stood out like a sore thumb from the brightly dressed crowd and it sent a chill up the boy's spine. His face was shrouded by his forest green cloak but the boy was able to spot a flash of white ceramic mask underneath the hood. The man noticed the prince staring at him and lifted his hand out of his pocket to subtly wave at him. Theseus frowned.

"I didn't know this was a masquerade, none of us wore a mask."

"It's..not?" Wilbur let out an awkward laugh and briefly stopped swaying, "Why do you say?"

Theseus turned briefly back to Wilbur and said, "There is a man over there with a mask and a hood. He waved at me."

Wilbur's eyes widened and he stopped dancing completely. The boy began to urgently scan the crowd, his hand gripping Theseus's arm tightly. Eventually, he relaxed but his voice still dripped with anxiety, "I don't see anyone wearing a mask. Just people in stuffy suits and dresses."

"But I—" Theseus cut off as he looked back over to the other side of the dance room. The man was gone.

"Looks like you needed that nap after all." Wilbur teased.

Theseus growled back, "*I know what I saw.*"

"*And what is it you think you saw?* We're at a banquet for a peace treaty our father signed today. There are guards everywhere, nobody's out to get us, Thes. *You're safe, okay?*" Wilbur squeezed his brother's shoulder affirmingly and after a moment, Theseus nodded his head.

"Your highnesses?" A voice called out next to them and Wilbur turned to see Schlatt walking over towards him with Tubbo trailing not far behind.

The man still wore his earlier getup of a long black leather tailcoat with a red sash tied around his waist. He had on simple black boots and black trousers. Bits of gold accentuated the tailcoat and the black gloves he wore. *Not the most welcoming outfit to wear to a ball.* Wilbur thought.

Tubbo's outfit on the other hand was quite fitting for the setting. It was a simple dark green waistcoat with a white tunic underneath and dark green trousers to match.

"Chancellor." Wilbur nodded then turned down to Tubbo, "Gremlin #2"

"I'll bite you," Tubbo promised and Wilbur took a notable step back.

"You can bite him later, Tubs. Right now, I need his Highness to follow me. Your father wants to talk to you." Schlatt said and then nudged Tubbo forward, "Why don't you and his Highness go cause Puffy as much trouble as humanly possible."

Tubbo and Theseus looked at each other for a moment and then both grinned before running off.

“Boys! Stay within sight of the guards, okay? Don’t go wandering too far off.” Schlatt added and both boys replied back with, “Okay!”

Wilbur sighed and shook his head, “I live in fear of the chaos they’ll cause when they’re older.”

Schlatt laughed and patted the boy on the back, “I still live in fear of the chaos *you’ll* cause, Wilbur. Let them have their fun.”

Wilbur took one last look at his brother in the crowd of people, just barely spotting his golden curls, and let out a breath,

“Yeah, I suppose the four of us won’t be little forever.”

“Where are we going? My dad said not to wander too far off.” Tubbo frowned as Theseus pulled him into an empty corridor and then down a stairwell.

“Relax, Tubbo. We’re heading down to the kitchen! If we’re lucky, Quackity will be down there and we can get some sweets. After that, we’ll head back up, okay?”

“Theseus, you’re in your prince clothes right now. Don’t you think someone will notice?” Tubbo argued and Theseus simply smiled and led him into an empty guest room.

The boy walked over to the simple wardrobe that was in every guest room and pulled out a child-sized blue cloak. He fumbled with the buttons on the cloak for a moment and then proudly said, “Ta-da!”

Tubbo's eyes widened incredulously and he asked, "How did you know that coat was in here?"

"It was Wilbur's when he was my age. Techno and he liked to run around the castle but didn't like being recognized so they put two cloaks in one of the empty guest rooms that never gets used." Theseus turned and pulled another identical cloak out. "Here, this one's for you."

The brunette grinned and quickly put his on. They shut the door behind them as they left, Theseus was sure to pull up his hood to hide his crown. They ran down a few more stairways and hallways until they eventually reached the kitchen. They were careful to duck and dodge past some of the chefs who were cooking food for the banquet. Thankfully due to the already chaotic state of the kitchen, nobody seemed to notice the two boys duck underneath one of the tables.

Theseus scanned the room and his face brightened as he spotted a boy, no older than twelve sporting a dark blue beanie.

"Quackity!" He called and barreled toward the older boy, catching him off guard.

"Woah! Easy, kid!" The boy stumbled, nearly losing his balance, but was able to catch himself on the table. Theseus giggled as the preteen pulled himself upright and pulled the prince back.

"Sorry," Theseus said, still grinning and Quackity's gaze softened as he pushed back the boy's hood to take a look at him.

His gaze turned to Tubbo who was standing a few feet away and he sighed, "I should've guessed you ankle-biters couldn't stay entertained for long. How long have you been away from the party?"

"Banquets are boring. They're full of snobby rich people who wear too much perfume." Tubbo said and then added, "We've only been gone a few minutes."

"A few minutes, ey? How would you boys feel about helping me bring in a delivery from the bakery? I'll let you two swipe some treats and then you can be on your way back." Quackity offered.

The two boys looked at each other deviously and then smiled, “We’d be happy to help.”

“Alright, they’re waiting outside. I was just about to let them in when his highness decided to scare the wits out of me.” Quackity ruffled Theseus’s hair and the blonde turned to swat at him.

“It’s not my fault you’re jumpy.” said the prince. Quackity sighed as he grabbed his coat from the nearby rack.

The backdoor of the kitchen was one of the only exits in the entire palace that was mostly unsupervised. It was mainly used for food delivery for the palace. Theseus had seen a guard post somewhere nearby once where people had to pass inspection to deliver food but that was it security-wise.

As they exited, Quackity grabbed both of the boys’ hands and said, “Stay close, I don’t want to be responsible if you two get lost. Your dads would *murder me*. Not to mention what the Queen would do.” He shuddered at the possibility.

“We’ll stay close. Promise.” piped Tubbo and Quackity looked somewhat assured. They walked down the fenced-in path all the way to the guard outpost where Theseus saw a girl about Quackity’s age and a boy slightly older than Tubbo waiting for them with a handful of large boxes, some of which were being pulled in a wagon.

“Quackity!” The girl called, her pink hair peeking out of her coat.

“The old man sent you out again? What is this, the third time this week?” Quackity’s eyes flashed with mild anger that Theseus didn’t quite understand. So instead he focused on the boy next to her that was shaking slightly.

He was most certainly a hybrid, likely an enderman. He had long ears, horns, and a tail that was coiled tightly around his boot. His long black and white hair was tied back into a neat braid. What was most interesting to Theseus was his almost luminescent green and red eyes.

As the group met in the middle, Theseus couldn’t help himself. Unfortunately, though, Tubbo was quicker, “You’re from the End...I’ve never met someone from the End. What kind of hybrid are you?”

Tubbo looked like he had a million other questions bouncing around in his head and Theseus let out a small laugh, “Tubbo, you should at least ask his name first.”

The boy ducked his head further into the muted purple scarf around his neck and moved behind the girl, his eyes timid and scared. The girl chuckled, “Don’t mind him, he’s just shy. His name is Ranboo and I’m his older sister, Niki. We’re here to deliver some pastries for the ball.”

“You’re a baker?” Theseus inquired, his eyes wide with curiosity. The girl shook her head and explained, “No, not yet. I’m his apprentice. My brothers and I just live there with him.”

“Brothers?” Theseus only spotted one.

“Jack has the flu right now so we left him at home, but he usually makes these deliveries with us.”

Quackity scoffed, “The old man needs to stop sending kids out into the street to deliver food, it’s dangerous and cold. It’s no wonder Jack got sick.”

Niki shrugged and then turned to her brother, “Come say hello, Ran. They won’t bite.”

Quackity snorted at that.

Ranboo slowly moved out from his sister’s shadow and said in a small voice, “Hi. I...um...I don’t know what kind of hybrid I am. Sorry.”

“That’s okay. It means you’re weird. And I like that.” Theseus decided and took some of the boxes from Ranboo’s arms. Tubbo grabbed the rest and said, “I like you too.”

A small smile formed on the boy’s black and white face and he grabbed the handle of the cart from Niki who had already shared a few of her boxes with Quackity.

The five of them quickly made their way inside. The sun was beginning to set and Theseus could smell the rainstorm on its way.

A sudden feeling of familiarity hit Kristin like a ton of bricks as she stood next to her husband, who was speaking to a few of their guests. It was so strong it made her dizzy.

“Phil?” she called, immediately grabbing his attention. The Emperor excused himself and hurried to her side.

“What is it? Are you alright?” He laid a hand on her shoulder, his blue eyes were fraught with concern.

“Do you feel that?” she asked, grabbing his hand so he could sense it as well. His eyes widened and he whispered. “I’ll be damned. The little shit survived the trip over.”

“Not only did the egg survive. It’s *here*. It’s in the castle and I highly doubt it’s still an egg. The Ender Prince is alive.” Kristin exclaimed in a hushed tone and Phil nodded, already deep in thought.

When Phil had exited the portal, Kristin had only caught a glimpse of the large ender dragon egg before it had teleported away, never to be seen again. She’d assumed it had just vanished entirely and let Phil know that the egg didn’t make it not long after he’d woken up.

“If they’re here and alive, then we have to find them. I’d like them to stay close by, given who they are. And unless their wings have grown in, they probably don’t know *what* they are. I owe it to the Dragon to explain to the child where they come from.” Phil said and Kristin nodded, squeezing his hand gently.

They were about to announce that they were going to retire from the party early when their sons practically ran into them, both frantic.

“Boys? Where is your brother?” Phil asked warily, his heart already sinking from the panic in Wilbur’s eyes. He could see Techno was nursing a headache, which could only mean his chat was panicking.

“Schlatt said they were with Puffy but when we went to find Puffy, she said she hadn’t seen them. We’ve looked all over the ballroom, they’re gone!”

“Tubbo’s gone too?” Kristin asked, her eyes shining with worry.

Techno nodded, “Tubbo too. But if they aren’t here...then they’ve probably taken our old cloaks and gone down to the kitchen to bug Quackity for sweets.”

Phil nodded, rubbing his eyes, “Let’s hope you’re right. Where is Schlatt?”

“He’s making excuses for you and Mum and himself right now and then I imagine he’ll—”

“Phil,” Schlatt called, looking pissed and terrified at the same time. He gave the man a look and Philza nodded and then turned to Kristin, “Take the boys back to their rooms and wait for me while we find them, okay?”

Kristin looked ready to argue but Phil’s resolve was set in stone, “Please, love. I’ll bring him back to you, okay?”

Finally, she nodded and ushered the boys away, who were already beginning to argue against it. They turned back to Phil and the look on his face must have been enough to quiet their complaints.

Once they were gone he turned to Schlatt. “Techno said to try the kitchen.”

“I’ve already sent Puffy and her guard out to search the Library and a million other places. They couldn’t have gotten far, someone is bound to recognize Theseus.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Phil muttered and exited the ballroom with his best friend hot at his heels.

“It’s about time you two made your way back upstairs. Unfortunately, by now I’m sure someone has noticed you’re gone.” Quackity said, wincing slightly.

Niki quirked up her brow confused, “Why would anyone from the banquet know them?”

Theseus giggled at that and wiped the crumbs of the cookie on his face off with his hand. He turned to Ranboo who was picking at a blueberry muffin and noticed every now and then he’d let out a shiver.

“Are you cold?” Theseus asked and the boy’s head shot up at the question. He turned to him and nodded meekly before answering, “A bit. It takes a while to get here, especially with the wagon.”

Theseus frowned and then wordlessly, took off his cloak and handed it to Ranboo. He could hear Niki gasp as she took in the sight of his outfit.

“Here. Take it. You need it more than I do.”

The boy looked stunned and he stuttered as he spoke, “T-thank you, your highness.” His eyes were practically bulging out of his head as took in the sight of the crown on his head.

“Just call me Theseus, okay? Friends get to call me by my real name,” he said cheerfully and got down from his stool.

“Friends? You want to be friends with me?” Ranboo asked in disbelief. Tubbo wrapped an arm around his neck casually,

“Course we do bossman. It’s not every day we meet someone our age. Also, you brought us cookies,” said Tubbo.

Ranboo let out a laugh. It was small and could hardly be considered a laugh, but he’d take it.

“So now you have to come back and see us since we are friends, promise?” Theseus stuck out his pinkie finger expectantly towards the boy. Ranboo stared at it confused for a moment until he eyed Tubbo linking his pinkies together to show him. He nodded and wrapped his pinkie finger around the prince’s and said, “Promise.”

Suddenly he noticed that the entire kitchen had fallen deathly silent and he saw Quackity wince. “Damn.”

From the other side of the wall, he could hear a hushed collection of “Your Majesty” and instantly felt his stomach drop.

Quackity swallowed and bravely stepped into the other room. He saw Tubbo give him a solemn salute as he passed by.

“Your Majesty, Chancellor. I’m so sorry I didn’t alert you immediately, they just wanted a snack and to see me. I never meant for them to stay as long as they did.”

Theseus heard his father in the other room, “It’s alright, kid. You’re not to blame.”

He heard Schlatt’s voice call and Tubbo froze, “Tubbo Underscore. Come here, *now*.”

“You too, Theseus’.” Phil called.

Ranboo took Theseus’s hand in his own and squeezed. “Friends protect each other right?” Theseus nodded.

“Let me protect you.”

Ranboo stood and tugged Theseus to his feet. The prince took a deep breath and grabbed Tubbo's hand as well. Together the three stepped into the other room with Niki close behind.

He noticed his father's eyes went from him to Ranboo in a split second and his eyes went wide. He whispered something to Schlatt who nodded.

Phil walked over to them and said sternly, "Go with Schlatt, *now*. We will talk more about this later."

Theseus hung his head low and turned to Ranboo, his eyes sad, "I'll see you later, Ranboo." Theseus turned back to Niki and gave a small smile, "It was nice meeting you. Please bring him back another day."

Niki smiled and said in a soft voice, "We'll be back your highness."

Tubbo whispered his own goodbyes before the two timidly walked over to Jschlatt who grabbed both of the boys by their hands and walked them out.

Phil stared at the boy in front of him for a long moment and then said, "My son seems to have taken quite a liking to your brother, I presume?"

Niki squeaked, not expecting the Emperor of the Antarctic Kingdom to address them whatsoever, "Yes your Majesty, he's my brother. We live with the nearby baker with our older brother, Jack."

"I see. I have a proposition for a new job for you if you're willing to hear me out?" Phil asked in a kind voice.

"I'm uh...but I'm only eleven." Niki responded.

At that moment Quackity piped up, "She's an amazing baker though, she made some of the pastries for the ball tonight. I could show her the ropes, Majesty."

“Quackity...” Niki muttered, pinching the boy.

The emperor chuckled at the children and asked, “Why don’t we go somewhere more private and I can explain what I mean.”

Ranboo and Niki looked at each other with confusion and eventually, the boy shrugged at her. Finally, Niki spoke, “Okay, but we can’t stay long. Our brother is sick at the moment.”

“How sick?” Philza asked.

Ranboo finally spoke, “He has a fever that won’t go down, we’ve tried everything but nothing works. Niki won’t admit it but we’re scared for him.”

The emperor’s eyes softened and he knelt in front of the boy and said, “I’ll personally send my guard to bring him here and our doctor can treat him.”

“We can’t afford a-”

“You won’t have to. I’ll pay myself.” Philza promised and Niki looked close to tears.

Ranboo smiled at the man and said, “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Ranboo.”

“Theseus!” The twins cried out at the sight of their little brother in the doorway. Schlatt held both boys in his arms as he stepped into the room and handed the blonde off to Kristin who instantly hugged the boy tight.

“Thank you, Schlatt. Thank you.” She said and gratefully squeezed his hand. Schlatt nodded his head and replied, “Of course, your Majesty.”

He looked down at his son in his arms and said, “Don’t fall asleep just yet, son. You’re still in trouble.”

Tubbo buried his face into his father’s coat and mumbled, “M’sorry, Dad.”

Schlatt melted a bit at that and hugged his son tightly, “I’m just glad you’re okay.”

“Your Majesty?” he called and Kristin looked up from Theseus who she was still holding tight. “Yes, Schlatt?”

“His majesty will be here in a little while. He had to take care of some business. I’m going to go to his office to talk to Tubbo, but then the two of us still have loads of work to get through tonight so—”

“Tubbo can sleep in here with the boys for tonight. Theseus won’t mind, will you?”

Theseus shook his head, still painfully quiet. Schlatt nodded and with Tubbo in his arms, left the room.

Kristin placed her son on the ground and knelt in front of him. She held the boy by his shoulder and spoke sternly, “I’m very disappointed in you Theseus. You promised me you’d behave tonight.”

Theseus sniffled and wiped his eyes, “I’m sorry, Mum. I didn’t mean to scare everyone. I just wanted to see Quackity and the party was no fun—”

“Theseus, you could’ve gotten hurt, you could have gotten *Tubbo hurt*. I—” Kristin sighs at the look on her son’s face. “Look at your brothers and look at me. Do you see how worried we were? Do you understand why you can’t go running off like that?”

“Yes, Mum.” Theseus didn’t raise his head from his chest and Kristin frowned but said nothing more.

“Go get into your pajamas and I’ll come to say goodnight to you after I talk to your father.” Kristin stood from the ground and walked out without a second glance.

As soon as the door shut, Theseus allowed himself to cry.

In a split second, he was in Wilbur’s arms with Techno at his side wiping the tears from his face.

“They won’t stay mad forever. They were just scared. We all were,” Techno said and Theseus sobbed in response into Wilbur’s nightshirt.

Techno stood to grab his pajamas from the wardrobe while Wilbur rocked him gently in his arms and began to sing softly to him.

“The evil it spread, like a fever ahead,”

“It was night when you died, my firefly.”

“What could I have said to raise you from the dead?”

“Oh, could I be the sky on the fourth of July?”

He gently set Theseus on the ground and helped him get into pajamas. Once they were on he gathered the boy back into his arms and began to sing once more. Techno curled up at Wilbur’s side and began running his fingers through Theseus’s hair.

“Well, you do enough talk,”

“My little hawk, why do you cry?”

“Tell me what did you learn from the Tillamook burn,”

“Or the Fourth of July?”

Wilbur chose not to sing the last line of the verse but Theseus finished it for him anyway, "*We're all gonna die.*"

It wasn't long before all three had fallen asleep on the floor together and when Phil walked into the room the fight left him and suddenly he couldn't find it in his heart to be mad at him.

"I was too hard on him. He's just a child," Kristin said softly as Phil lifted the boy from Wilbur's limp arms. He gently placed the boy into his bed and kissed him on the top of his head as he tucked him underneath the covers. He then grabbed the stuffed bear that had been tossed onto the floor at some point and gently placed it into his son's arms.

"He needed to learn eventually and hopefully now he knows better than to run off on his own." Phil pulled away and turned to see Kristin lift Wilbur off the floor, causing Techno to peacefully slump to the side a bit. Phil smiled at the sight and gathered the boy in his arms. Techno's head flopped against his shoulder as he carried him over to Wilbur's bed and sat him down beside his twin.

Even on opposite sides of the bed, Techno seemed to notice his twin's presence and reached out in his sleep to grab Wilbur's arm. It wasn't to move it, it was almost as if he was making sure he was still there.

Kristin leaned down to kiss them both on the cheek and sighed, "This is what I miss the most when I'm away."

Philza gasped softly and dramatically held his hand over his heart, "Not your loving husband? You wound me, my lady."

Kristin swatted at him and Phil laughed quietly before wrapping his arms around her and kissing her gently. He pulled away after a moment and said, "It's you I miss the most."

"We did what the gods wanted and now maybe they'll finally leave us alone for good. Theseus is safe from harm and he has Wilbur and Techno by his side to protect him. You're the Emperor and the people are happy. The fight is done. We've done enough for them." Kristin said with tears in her eyes and Phil nodded solemnly.

“The only thing the high gods care about is that Theseus stays alive. They don’t care about the twins, they’ve let them die before. They’d let *me* die too if the chance arose. But not him. They need him...for *something*. We are but a means to an end, my Goddess.” Anger flared in Phil’s eyes that Kristin knew all too well. This was not the first time they’d had this conversation and it certainly wouldn’t be the last.

“I won’t let them use him. He’s not a vessel. He’s a *child*. He’s *our* child. And I’ll be damned before I let anything happen to any of you.” Kristen spoke with an ire Phil knew all too well. Knew better than anyone.

“Even after all these years, my life remains yours to keep,” Phil said.

“I never wanted your life, Phil. I just wanted your love.”

“Now who’s the sap?” Phil teased and Kristin rolled her eyes but couldn’t stop the smile that he tore from her from spreading across her face.

He woke with a start, a blurred dream vanishing from his mind too fast for him to catch. And suddenly we didn’t know why he’d awoken at all.

He sat up from the desk and moved aside the paperwork he’d been sleeping on. Looking around Phil immediately spotted Schlatt reclined in his chair with Tubbo fast asleep on his chest. Both were completely unconscious.

He was lucky Tubbo was there because he would’ve thrown a book at Schlatt otherwise for not waking him.

Phil sighed and stood from his chair, he stretched out his wings behind him and yawned. *I need a walk, then I’ll get back to my work.*

He just needed to clear his head, maybe grab some coffee while he was up. Phil looked down at his pocket watch and sighed. It was a little past three in the morning.

He turned to Schlatt and debated throwing the book again.

Phil noticed he still had his emerald circlet on and decided to leave it. He was too tired to attempt searching for his hat at this hour of the night. He slipped on his shoes and shut the door behind him before leaving the room. As he passed by the boys' room he couldn't help but check on them and sure enough, when he looked inside he saw Wilbur and Techno curled up in the bed in the far corner and Theseus sprawled across his mattress asleep.

Phil chuckled quietly and gently shut the door behind him before continuing down the hall. Thankfully, no one was in the kitchen at this time of the night and the few guards that he did see all respectfully bowed their heads as he passed by. He quickly made a kettle of coffee and poured himself a cup.

Outside he could hear a quiet roll of thunder and then the gentle sound of rain against the windows. He liked nights like this. Nights where he could just be Phil.

His boys were asleep and there was nobody around to feel intimidated by his presence. He knew it wasn't personal, it was just the legacy he'd left behind before he'd slept for a thousand years and his status as emperor that made people so tongue-tied around him.

He finished his cup and left the kettle on the countertop in case anyone else woke up for a midnight stroll. As he headed back, he passed through what Wilbur called, "The Hall of Glass". In reality, it was just a long hall filled with windows on one side that showed a view of the kingdom.

He saw his reflection in the window and took in the sight of himself. No longer immortal, he now aged like any man. The youth of his twenties was fading and his thirties were quickly encroaching upon him. Phil sighed as he spotted two wrinkles in the corner of his eyes that Kristin referred to as "crow's feet". *How ironic*. He was aging and so were his sons. He would die one day and he could accept that.

He turned to look at the many portraits that hung on the wall opposite the window and he smiled as his eyes settled on the portrait that had been painted not long after Theseus had arrived.

His wings wrapped around the twins and in his arms sat Theseus. Still so small, just a tiny thing with large blue eyes and golden curls...and freckles that dusted his...

Wait...

This is...

This isn't right.

Why is this so familiar?

“Papa?”

He felt his entire world crumble beneath his fingers right then and there.

Philza's blood ran cold at the sound of his youngest. *Who should not be out of bed. He should not be out of bed. Oh my god.*

Theseus looked at him with those big blue eyes that he had grown to love from the moment he'd first seen him in that cursed vision. The boy looked...*the exact same*. His bear was clutched tightly in his arms and he ran towards his father as clumsily as he had the first time and wrapped his arms around his legs.

Phil's hands trembled as he picked him up. This time, when he stared at his son, it was not to memorize every detail of his face. No, he already knew them by heart. Instead, he looked at him with terror in his eyes and fear for what was to come.

He couldn't control the shakiness in his voice if he tried, “What are you doing out of bed, mate? It's late.”

“I had a bad dream, Papa.” Theseus cried. *I know you did.*

“Do you want to tell me about it?” *Please don't.*

But he did anyway.

“There was a scary man with a smile...and he said he was going to take my wings. I told him my wings aren’t grown yet and he...he smiled wider and said, 'Don’t worry. I’ll keep you locked up until they do.’”

He wanted to scream. He wanted to hold Theseus as tight as he could and never let him go. He wanted so desperately to say anything other than the words made from dust that were spilling from his mouth.

But he’d lost control over his own life the moment the High Gods threw him down into the world and told him to follow their rules. He was a fool to believe he’d ever had a say at all.

“Don’t worry, my son. I’ll never let anyone take you from me.” More than anything else in the world, Phil wanted desperately to believe he still could save him. That it wasn’t too late.

Theseus looked up at him with the same look that had haunted his dreams and thoughts every waking moment since he’d jumped through that portal.

His tiny voice shook as he spoke, “But what if he gets me anyway? What if you can’t stop him?”

The words burned in his throat as they tore through him, “Even if that somehow happened...I’d never stop looking for you. I’d tear this world to shreds until I found you. And I know your brothers would never stop looking for you either.”

I’ve failed you, Theseus. I have failed you.

Forgive me.

Theseus nodded and rested his head against his shoulder. Phil’s feet moved of their own accord and Phil felt tears stream down his face as he clung to his son for as long as he could.

What would happen when he reached the nursery? Would he still come face to face with his failures or was this just a sign? Maybe now was simply the time to act and prepare for what may come.

Maybe he'd see nothing at all. *Maybe this is all just a bad dream.*

It has to be.

He reached the door of the nursery too soon and he squeezed his son to his chest before setting him down and opening the door of the nursery to let him inside. He took a deep breath and looked at the twins curled up together in the corner of the room.

Save him.

He turned around and what he saw was everything he'd tried so desperately to prevent and had failed spectacularly at. He'd lost. He had been meant to lose the whole time.

There was never a way to prevent this.

There was never a way to save Theseus.

Phil found his voice just as the sword plunged through his abdomen and out his back. His voice cut off with a loud exhale as all the wind was knocked from his lungs. As he looked up the world seemed to bend nauseatingly, but he saw the face of his attacker regardless.

A white mask grinned at him from the dark.

The last thing he heard before everything faded away was Theseus screaming for him.

heheh...surprise?

jumps into the void

Interlude

Chapter Notes

An Interlude.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Your brother was right, you are far too attached to this world. Was he really worth it?

Of course, he was. I'd do it for them all.

You do realize what you'll be giving up if you go through with this...don't you?

I do.

They're mortals, dear. They're not meant to last forever, you know that better than anyone. I let you have your fun but your actions have put the child in great danger.

Please, I have to try.

I cannot allow you to interfere as a mortal anymore, you've caused too much damage.

Then I'll go as something else.

It won't be easy, you really think you can save him?

No, but I can make sure that they can.

Chapter End Notes

Consider joining my Discord to yell at me for the pain I cause you.

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Have I Found You, Flightless Bird?

Chapter Notes

TW: Codependent behavior. Emotional and Physical Abuse. Nothing too graphic just be warned.

Word Count: 4,400 words

This chapter was beta-read by my friend @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A young boy sat by the large arched window that overlooked the vast forest and mountains before him. In the distance, if he squinted, he could spot a large mountain that outshone them all. For within the mountain, built on its side, he saw a castle and the kingdom that had been built below it.

The same one he'd seen every day since they had moved into the tower a year ago.

The boy sighed and crossed his arms under his head so he could rest it on the window sill. Dusk had fallen and he knew it was almost time for bed, but he couldn't bring himself to look away from the castle.

He had a strange feeling that something would be different tonight. He didn't know why he thought that, but in looking at the kingdom that had so long been his only worthwhile view, he just knew.

Maybe it was because today was his birthday. His sixth birthday.

Last year his markings had come in, and while he had been ecstatic over it, his brother had only expressed distress. That night he remembered him growling, "All it means is that you are in even more danger than you were before. It's not a gift. Do you know how much people would pay to get their hands on you? That is why we stay in this tower."

That night he'd learned a lesson. His newfound powers weren't something to admire and flaunt, they were something to be terrified of.

Suddenly, something in the distance caught his eye that stemmed from the kingdom. The boy looked on curiously as he spotted a single star of light rise into the sky like a balloon. *Maybe that's what it is? No balloons don't glow, that's silly.*

He watched as the light trailed higher into the sky until it disappeared into the clouds, out of sight. He assumed that would be the end until all of a sudden, the entire kingdom lit up like the sun and thousands of stars rose into the air.

The boy had never seen anything like it before. It was the most beautiful thing he'd ever witnessed. At that moment, something new and joyful grew warm in his chest. For the first time, he had hope.

Hope that one day, he'd be able to fly away like those stars and be free of this tower.

"Tommy," a voice called from behind him and the blonde paled, quickly shutting the window. "Oh, Dream! You're up! I thought you and George-

"Go to bed, Tommy. *Now*," his brother hissed, his face dark with anger. Tommy shrunk into himself, trying to make himself as small as he could as he stood.

Dream usually wasn't this mad at him. *Had he forgotten to do one of his chores?* He decided not to ask and quietly squeaked, "Sorry."

With that, the six-year-old sped up the stairs and into his room, where he promptly threw himself underneath his covers. That night he dreamed of clumsily playing the piano with a brunette boy with a hazy face and no name.

And in the morning, when the sky was no longer filled with lights he told Dream about the boy in his dreams. His brother had simply smiled and made him his least favorite tea that George had given Dream, saying it would help with his nightmares.

By the afternoon, he had no memory of the horned boy with blue eyes at all.

Ten Years Later...

As the sun rose above the horizon a small raven flew from her perch into the familiar woods she'd known for many years. She weaved through the trees effortlessly before nose diving down a small cliff. Then she flew through an entrance covered by vines that led to the mountain-enclosed hollow where his tower stood as it had for many years, hidden completely from the world.

The bird shifted her treasure of the day more firmly in her beak before landing on the small window on the roof of the tower. She pecked at the glass a few times before hearing the familiar sound of footsteps echoing below her. There was a distinct sound of a lever, and the window opened, allowing her inside.

The crow fluttered down and landed on the shoulder of a boy no older than fifteen with blonde hair that fell to his shoulders. It was tied back into a messy ponytail which meant strands of his golden hair still fell occasionally into his face, tickling his faded freckle-stained cheeks. She tilted her head at the boy's blue eyes that had stayed the same even after all these years.

She chirped once and the boy raised his hand to his shoulder and gently pet her. "G'Morning, Crow. What did you bring for me today?"



The bird would have smiled if she still could.

Her son had always been terrible at naming things.

Crow dropped the piano string she'd found in a back alleyway somewhere in the kingdom into Thes-Tommy's hands and he smiled widely, "How did you know one of my strings was missing? Thank you, Crow."

The bird moved to nuzzle against his hand and then flew over the patchwork mess of a piano she'd been watching him fix on and off again for years. She felt her heart warm at the sight of the smile that still hadn't left his face. It was a sight that was becoming rarer and rarer as the years went on.

Usually, he would bring parts for Tommy to tinker with, but sometimes the job fell to her, though Tommy would never ask. She just knew.

Crow landed on one of the keys and hopped around trying to get it to push down. Sadly she just didn't weigh enough. She let out a defeated chirp and Tommy laughed at her antics. He gently pressed his finger down on the key she was on.

The note that came out was severely out of tune but still pretty in its own warbly way. Tommy didn't seem to notice, after all, how would he be able to know the difference between a piano that was in tune and one that was out of tune? He had nothing to compare it to.

Any memory he'd had of sitting in his mother's lap with his hands overtop her own as she played had long been erased from his mind with whatever poison his kidnapper had been giving him.

Tommy fiddled with the string as he installed it into the piano for a few minutes and grabbed the dummy pin from his pocket. He wrapped the coarse wire around it as best he could before threading it into the piano.

"How the hell were you able to fly with this, Crow? It's stiffer than-" Crow squawked disapprovingly to which the blonde laughed. "Sorry, sorry. I'll keep my bad jokes to myself."

While Tommy worked, Crow kept watch for any sign of h-Dream. At least, that's what the man called himself. Tommy's piano sat in the corner of his bedroom, which was a floor above both Dream's room and the living space. The staircase that led out of the room went down to the living/kitchen area, while Dream's room was connected to a doorway underneath the staircase.

The main area wasn't too terribly small, Tommy still had room to run around and play, but it was the *only* place the child had ever gotten to play.

Eleven years. No human or any outside interaction besides Dream and George. Tommy hadn't been outside in over a decade and the pale, malnourished boy that was whistling to himself cheerfully as he installed a piano string into a broken instrument Dream refused to fix for him was the result.

"And...got it! Crow! Come listen!" Tommy yelled from upstairs and the bird immediately circled back and flew into the room, landing on top of the boy's head.

Tommy giggled at her and flipped a few pages in the book of piano songs Dream had given him. He settled on [a song](#) Crow hadn't heard before.

His fingertips settled on the keys for a moment and he took a deep breath in before his hands began to move. A melody that reminded Crow of how it felt to glide through the sky moments before a storm's first roll of thunder filled the air. The bird looked on in amazement as the boy's fingers danced across the keys without error. Tommy's eyes were closed and his entire being seemed to come alive as he played.

Due to the time he'd spent in the tower, those few piano lessons he'd received as a child were put to good use as one of his only means of expression. Dream never allowed him to play when he was there but thankfully, the man was absent most of the time doing who knows what. So whenever he'd finished his chores and schoolwork for the day, he would usually find himself at his busted old piano. And when he played, he could be himself.

It was a rare moment, where the boy was no longer the mask he put up to deal with Dream. The quiet, timid boy Dream had shaped him into was gone now and her son took his place. Alive, vibrant, and free as a bird.

The melody shifted, growing more hopeful in its tune as Tommy's body moved along with each press of a key, creating a new note to add to the symphony-no sonata he was creating.

And then Tommy let out a cry of pain and the piece was left unfinished for the day. His hand slammed into the yellowed keys, creating an awful cacophony of out-of-tune noise. One hand reached to his back and pressed into the area in between his shoulder blades, where his wings were begging to be let out. The bird watched as Tommy's hand began to glow a soft golden light as he attempted to soothe some of the discomfort in his back with his magic.

Unfortunately though, his powers normally didn't work well on himself or worked very slowly. Though it had no trouble keeping Dream and George young and healthy.

"Ah, fucking shit!" Tommy swore after a moment and his hand returned to its normal color. He stood up from the bench and turned to Crow wincing. "It's just my wings, my powers are having trouble reaching my wings since they're still in my back. I'm alright though."

No, you're very clearly not.

"Dream will be home soon and then I'll ask if I can take them out and try to heal them up a bit when we talk about my birthday gift tonight."

Crow had seen Tommy's wings a few times. And every time she looked at them she wanted to come out of her hiding spot and poke Dream's eyes out of his skull for allowing them to practically rot away in his back, only for them to be healed and then forced back into his spine for another week.

She didn't understand it. What reason did he have for forcing the kid to keep his wings hidden? Nobody but her was around to see them.

The only time Tommy was allowed to have his wings out for more than a day was whenever the pain got so unbearable that the boy practically sobbed for permission just to feel some relief from the never-ending cramping he felt.

"Tommy!" A voice echoed from outside down below and Crow's heart sank at the dead look on Tommy's face. It was an expression that was becoming more and more common for him as time went on. He'd been through so much, and the bird could only hope he could hold out a little longer.

“Let down the ladder. I’ve got something to show you,” Dream called again.

Tommy stood to his feet and let out a sigh. Crow watched with sad eyes as Theseus disappeared from sight and Tommy emerged in his stead.

“Go on home, Crow. You know Dream doesn’t like you,” Tommy said softly, letting the bird perch on his finger. Crow chirped sadly and Tommy gave her a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“I’ll be okay, birdie. I always am.” With that, he raised his arm into the air and watched in muted despair as Crow flew up and out the open window. *Freer than he could ever hope to be.*

Tommy wiped his expression clean and folded his book of piano pieces into the hidden box under his piano bench. The blonde quickly made his way down the stairs and did a quick scan for anything out of place.

No. The house is spotless, my classwork is perfect and I’ve already got a fire going. I’m fine.

“Tommy! Drop the fucking ladder, kid! I’m not getting any younger down here, y’know.” Dream barked, his voice sounding more irritated now.

“Sorry! I’m coming.” Tommy squawked and stumbled over to the biggest window in the entire tower. It was also the only entrance and exit out of the tower that he knew of. There was a rolled-up ladder attached to a crank that he quickly unlatched the binding of and pushed over the edge of the window. The ladder unfurled and Dream began climbing up.

Within minutes, Dream stepped into the tower and dropped his green hood. He shook out his hair for a moment before tying it back out of his eyes. His brother was tall, with overgrown dirty blond hair and bright green eyes. His tan skin was covered in freckles and scars that he’d accumulated over the years including one that trailed over the bridge of his nose and down his cheek.

Tommy began turning the crank that lifted the ladder back up and into the tower. Once he’d finished he found his brother had hung up his cloak for the day and was giving him a small smile.

Good mood today.

He stood upright and Dream came up to him, scanning him over for any imperfections. When he found none, he smiled and clapped a hand on his shoulder. Tommy bit his tongue to hide back the pained yelp that stuck in his throat as his wings cried out in retaliation.

“You did well, Tommy. I know pulling up that stupid ladder every day isn’t as easy as it looks.” Dream said, surprisingly genuine and Tommy’s heart leapt at the rare moment of praise.

“Thank you, Dream. How was your day today? Fight off any bandits or pirates?”

His brother was a sword for hire, which often meant he’d be gone for days at a time. During that time, Tommy would do his best to stave off the ever-present boredom he felt with whatever he could to distract himself.

Dream let out a laugh and his green eyes glinted as he spoke, “Not today, Tommy. Maybe next time I’ll be able to bring you a real sword. But I did manage to grab a few things from the market for dinner. I’ll cook.”

Just ask.

“Oh okay, I’ll set up the table then, but there is something I wanted to ask you-”

“In a minute, Tommy. I’m tired and beat up from my trip and I’d like to settle in a bit before my little brother bombards me with a million questions. Just be patient alright?”

Talking to Dream felt like walking on thin ice, a simple wrong step could cause the ice to crack underneath his feet and send Tommy into the icy waters.

Careful. Ask to heal him and try again.

“Anything I can do to help?” Tommy asked pointedly. He noticed Dream was holding his arm in a weird way and worry swirled in his chest like it always did whenever Dream returned home injured.

Dream smiled and ruffled his hair eliciting Tommy to lean into the rare affection.

“You’re a good kid, Tommy. Always so ready to help me out. It’s my arm. Some jackass came at me with a knife during a job and sliced me pretty good.”

Tommy paled. *What if someone had hurt him worse? What would he do then?* He was nothing without Dream, just an empty shell of a person.

His older brother was his protector. He needed him.

Tommy would heal Dream as many times as he wanted if it meant he’d never leave him.

But there was always that lingering voice in the back of his head that whispered this wasn’t normal. He’d read a lot in his spare time growing up and he’d seen the relationships people had with each other in those books.

The siblings he’d seen in those were kind to one another. They’d bicker at times and still have their fights but it was different from the fights he’d have with Dream. The ones in the books didn’t leave one sibling curled up in the corner fearful of the other. The siblings in the books he read were never scared of what they might be like when they returned home.

They weren’t like this.

But then again...those books were fiction. They weren’t *real*. But Dream was. He was all he had. And that was supposed to be enough.

Dream seemed to notice the panic in the boy’s eyes and spoke gently, “I’m alright, Tommy. Just a quick heal and I’ll be good as new. Nothing to worry about, okay?”

Tommy relaxed a bit at that and then led his brother over to the couch in front of the fireplace. Dream removed his wrist braces from his arms and pushed back his sleeve. Tommy winced at the ugly gash on the underside of Dream's forearm.

"Damn, that looks like it hurt like a bitch, dude," Tommy said, wrapping his hand around the wound and Dream nodded wincing slightly at the touch,

"It wasn't exactly pleasant."

Tommy slowly closed his eyes as he felt his markings light up as they always did when he used his magic, regardless of whether or not his wings were out. The golden power trailed down his arms and to his hands, causing them to glow a soft yellow as the wound on Dream's arm grew smaller and smaller until eventually the skin was smooth and all that remained was a thin white scar.

Dream sighed and rubbed at his arm. "Ah, that feels so much better. Thank you."

"Can I ask my question now?" Tommy said, hopeful. He had to choose though, between his comfort and his dream. He couldn't ask both. Dream would get upset.

He decided to finally swallow his fear and risk it and ask about the lights. Dream nodded and Tommy took in a deep breath, "Well...as you might be aware...my birthday is in a few days."

Something flitted across Dream's face too quick for him to catch but the man nodded. Tommy continued, "Well...it's about my present?"

"Stop dragging on the question, Tommy. Just ask." Dream rolled his eyes, exasperated. Tommy flinched at that but still managed to find the courage to get out the question that he'd been trying to ask Dream for months.

"I want to see the lights, Dream. I want you to take me outside to see the lights for my sixteenth birthday. Just this one time."

Tommy's heart dropped to his stomach when Dream's face darkened and he growled, "You want to go outside?"

"Y-yes." Tommy stuttered.

Dream inhaled deeply trying to calm himself before responding, "You know what happened to our sister, Tommy. You know what happened to our home, to our parents? You know how dangerous people are. What on earth are you thinking? Do you even hear yourself?"

Their sister, Drista, had wings like him. She had beautiful green moth wings that according to Dream, Tommy loved. Their sister had been killed along with their parents a few days before Tommy's fifth birthday.

According to Dream, the Angelhunters had come to their village and razed it to the ground, slaughtering anyone with wings or anyone harboring someone with wings.

Dream had barely been able to escape with Tommy and George, but not before receiving a nasty scar across his nose.

The three found the tower and Dream decided it was the perfect place to keep Tommy caged after it became apparent the boy would develop wings. George didn't live there, however. He had a cottage not far from the tower that Tommy had never seen.

Tommy couldn't remember Drista well. Whenever he tried to imagine her he came up with nothing. Sometimes he'd imagine a boy with pink hair but that wasn't right. Drista had dirty blond hair and green eyes like Dream. He couldn't even remember his parents or the village he'd been born in.

Dream later told him that as they had been making their escape Tommy had nearly been killed by one of the hunters who had slammed the boy into the wall so hard Dream had thought for a moment he'd been killed. But at that moment Tommy's powers awoke for the first time and he'd been able to heal himself subconsciously.

George later said that the incident was probably why he had so much trouble remembering his childhood.

Regardless of that truth, Tommy couldn't back down. His sanity depended on it. "I'll keep in my wings! Please Dream, it's just for one night, I promise! Nobody will ever know!" Tommy stood from the couch and couldn't keep his voice from rising as he tried to convince Dream.

The man shot up from his seat as well and argued, "You don't know that, Tommy! You have no idea how evil this world is. They have ways to find kids like you. And once they do? They'll tear your wings from your back and sell them for a good profit. *Just like they did to Drista.*"

His green eyes flashed dangerously at him and then to something next to him on the counter. Dream grabbed it and then smashed the vase of daisies that Tommy had set out earlier that day onto the ground. Tommy flinched harshly at the noise and dug his teeth into his lip until he tasted blood. His whole body was shaking. But he still refused to give up. He could take whatever punishment Dream would deal for this.

He stared down at the daisies on the floor for a long moment. They were covered in broken ceramic and water. He'd read a book once on flowers a long time ago, daisies were special.

They stood for hope and innocence.

He flinched again when Dream came back over to him, squashing the daisies under his boot without a second glance. The man grabbed him by his wrist and yanked him to the side. Tommy winced as he felt his arm twist unnaturally.

"This is how you repay my kindness? I've spent the past eleven years of your life keeping you safe from this world and you just want to go out and explore it?"

"It's better than rotting away in this tower till I turn eighteen!" Tommy yelled back. He snatched his injured wrist away and took a wobbly step away from the man.

"Eighteen? Eighteen?!" Dream was very angry now, he'd fallen through the ice and there was no going back. But Tommy had the ire to fight and Dream knew it.

“Yes, eighteen! That’s an adult! I’ll be able to protect you as you protect me and you won’t need to keep me here anymore.”

Dream stared at him for a long time, his eyes rageful. Finally, he spoke, his voice low and cold, “There is no age at which you are going to be safe from the world, Tommy. You are not leaving this tower, *ever*.”

Tommy felt every last bit of the hope he’d been storing away in his heart for years shatter as the truth of Dream’s words hit.

“*Never...?*” Tommy’s voice shook violently and he felt his knees begin to tremble.

“Never, Tommy. It’s time to accept that.” With that, Dream brushed past him and left the boy shaking with grief at the knowledge that his future was lost.

Dream knew he shouldn’t have said it, but he couldn’t risk Tommy getting antsy when the job was so close to being finished.

Just a few more days.

His wings would ignite, signifying that they were fully grown and he and George could safely remove them from Tommy in his sleep. The boy would never feel any pain.

Once they were given to XD and Dream and George were freed from his service, then maybe he could try to make amends. Maybe they could even introduce him to the outside world a little after he recovered. Eleven years was a long time and despite his best efforts, he couldn’t help but be attached to him. He was his little brother and he loved him as much as he was capable of loving anyone.

That love only went so far however. He knew if worse came to worse, Dream would do what needed to be done to be free.

Even if it meant his brother’s death.

Was it selfish? Absolutely. But Tommy would never know the hell of being in servitude to a selfish, insane, arrogant God for a thousand years. If Tommy had to die, it wouldn't be painful, he would make sure of it. And after it was done, Tommy could be with his mother.

Still, he could've been nicer to the kid. The man sighed and turned back to Tommy who was still standing there frozen in front of the fireplace as pale as a sheet.

"Tommy..." He frowned when the boy flinched at the sound of his name. Dream walked back over to him and gently lifted up his chin. "I'm sorry I got so angry. You just pushed me too far."

Tommy jerked his head away from his grasp and Dream sighed.

"I know your future sounds bleak but I promise it'll get better. I'm doing this for your own good, kid. You're all the family I have left."

The boy didn't respond but still melted into Dream's arms when he pulled him in for a hug.

Chapter End Notes

Consider joining my discord for updates on TGP! <https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also follow me on Instagram for art on TGP (@_emiartse)

See you guys in the next chapter!

It's Quiet Uptown

Chapter Notes

TW: PTSD and Flashbacks containing acts of violence against a child

Word Count: 5,500 words

buckle up boys this is an angsty one

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Y’know Sam, I think his highness is finally starting to give you a run for your money.” The Captain teased from the sidelines as she watched the warden take a swing at the prince.

Technoblade calculated his position carefully as he dodged his teacher’s attack by hitting him as hard as he could with his wing. The green-haired man lost his footing from the heavy impact and tumbled against the matted flooring and onto his back. He barely had a moment to react before the prince’s sword came down hard against his axe.

“He started giving me a run for my money when he was eighteen, Puffy. I just had to learn how to run faster.” The warden gritted out as he pushed back against the prince’s attack.

Sam kicked the man’s feet out causing the prince to lose focus on his mentor and instead focus on catching himself. The creeper-hybrid used the few seconds of time he’d bought himself to scramble back to his feet and then lunge at his student. His axe clashed once more with Technoblade’s sword and the prince grunted from the impact.

He shoved his teacher away with as much force as he could muster, sending the man stumbling backward. His axe fell from his hands and Techno grinned.

I’ve got him.

He raised his sword to strike when his ear twitched at the sound of the Captain who was just outside of his peripheral vision, ready to strike. *Two versus one it is then.* He jumped on Sam’s axe

before he had time to grab it and pinned it underneath his right boot as he whirled around to block Puffy's blow.

Sam yanked the axe out from beneath Techno's foot but the prince was quick to hop off of it before he could lose his footing.

Now he's in trouble. Sam is free and Puffy has him occupied. Puffy brought down her sword against Techno's again and the prince cursed under his breath. He's out of time and Sam's aim will hit Puffy if he lunges out of the way.

Shit.

Techno gave in and ducked, using his legs to sweep out the Captain's feet sending her to the ground. Sam's axe swung dangerously close over their heads but ultimately missed the two.

"Bruh..." Techno muttered as Sam looked down at Techno with a rather smug look and gently nudged him with the axe, "*Dead.*"

"That's hardly fair. You about took Puffy's head off!"

"Yes, but if you hadn't protected your enemy, you would've won, your highness." Sam explained and Techno scoffed, "It was Puffy...I wasn't gonna let either of you take a hit like that."

"Ah yes, but you must remember, highness, when we spar we aren't your mentors. *We are the enemy.* Also, the worst the weapons can do is give you a nasty concussion." Sam's dark eyes glinted back the prince's reflection and he smiled. He took the hand that Sam offered and was pulled to his feet.

"Alright, again." Technoblade requested already moving back into position. His mentors turned to one another and Puffy shook her head her voice suddenly sad.

"I'm sorry, your highness, but you need to start getting ready...for the...for *his ceremony.*" Puffy trailed off, her eyes glazed over sadly.

Memorial. Techno corrected in his mind. It was eleven years ago today that he'd lost his little brother. Eleven long and painful years without Theseus.

Usually, he was good at holding back the grief that constantly tore at his heart, but today was too much. That's why he was out here in the first place.

He was about to stall for as much time as he could when he saw him. A tuft of golden curls and fish-like eyes peering out from behind Puffy. The four-year-old boy's skin was deathly pale and he was still wearing the long white nightgown he'd worn that night.

It wasn't real, he knew Theseus wasn't actually there in front of his eyes. The boy that stared back at him with a blank expression was most likely dead. This ghost that had been following him around all day was all in his head.

He wasn't real.

He blinked and the child vanished from sight.

Techno tried to squash his chat's grie-no it was his grief too- and shook his head, his throat tight with emotion, "No, I'm not...just..."

"Techno!" Theseus cried, trying to grab onto his clothing as Technoblade jumped onto their father's attacker. The man faltered from his path towards the balcony and tried to shake the eleven-year-old off as hard as he could. The knife that Puffy had given Techno for his tenth birthday was shoved beneath the man's mask and he turned it in his hand to slice at whatever he could.

He assumed he hit something because the man cried out in pain and used his free hand to grab Techno by the back of his shirt. He slammed the child into the wall brutally. Techno felt his head crack against the wall.

The last thing he saw before he blacked out was Wilbur being dragged across the room by his hair and Theseus's hands clawing at the masked man as he tried to get him to release their brother.

His body shook as the memory released him and he jerked away from the hands he could feel touching his face, trying to pull him back.

“Don’t...*Don’t fucking touch me!*” Techno jerked his sword from his sheath and pointed it at the two. Sam and Puffy raised their hands in surrender and Techno took a moment to steady his breathing which sounded a little more like choked sobs.

“I need to...*I need...* Wilbur...I have to go...*I’m sorry...*” Techno dropped the dull blade at Sam’s feet and rushed back inside the castle. His hand came to cover his mouth as he tried to keep himself together as he ran through the familiar halls.

His chat was out of control and chanting the same mantra to him over and over.

You could have saved him.

You could have saved him.

You could have saved him.

You could have saved him.

You could have saved him.

Or maybe that was just his own thoughts.

He could feel his teeth digging into his palm as he tried to keep himself from screaming, trying to keep him from openly mourning for his dead brother right there in the hallway for everyone to see.

Eleven years to the day hadn’t made a goddamn dent in the grief he felt.

He finally made it back to their hall and he had to steady himself on the wall as another memory violently tore through him.

“We’re doing everything we can kid, but Theseus is gone. They took him.” Schlatt’s voice rang through the room like an echo to his ears and Techno felt his legs give out. Schlatt caught him as he hit the ground and held him in his arms.

Techno stared over Schlatt’s shoulder at Wilbur’s bed with a blank expression for a long moment. He watched as his twin wordlessly got up from the floor, spotting something glinting from underneath Wilbur’s pillow.

His twin dug his hands under the pillow and pulled something out from beneath it. Wilbur opened his palm and let out a wail so broken and painful he thought his brother was dying. Techno found the strength to pull away from Schlatt’s arms and stumbled across the room till he was able to fling his arms around Wilbur’s back, pulling the sobbing boy against him.

Techno looked over his shoulder and saw what his brother was holding.

If he thought he’d experienced enough grief for one night then he was a fool. In Wilbur’s small hands was Theseus’ emerald pendant that the four-year-old had misplaced earlier today.

There it was, sitting in his brother’s palm as a permanent reminder to him that he had failed. He had failed to protect his baby brother. He’d broken his promise to his father and allowed him to be taken from him.

It wasn’t something he could ever forgive himself for.

Techno fell off of Wilbur’s shoulders and pressed his still aching skull into the hardwood floor, screaming. His chat was screaming. He was screaming. Wilbur was screaming.

Theseus was gone.

He’d failed.

“Wilbur,” Technoblade called out brokenly as he leaned against the bedroom door to his brother’s room.

He heard shuffling for a moment and then the door opened allowing the man to stumble into his twin's room. Techno looked up at his brother and saw that his crimson eyes were puffy and red from crying, not that Techno looked any different.

The brunette sniffed and wiped his red-tinted glasses clean on his shirt before putting them back on his face. His blue and black wing curled inward as if to hug around his shoulder. The twenty-two-year-old placed his hands on his hips and let his head drop.

"I see your day is about as shit as mine has been." Wilbur coughed and Techno let out a poor excuse of a laugh at that.

After another moment of standing in front of each other, awkwardly trying to see who would break first, Techno conceded. He slumped to his knees and his twin immediately followed him to the ground.

Techno buried his face into his brother's collar and let all the emotion he'd been holding back soak into Wilbur's shirt.

"*I keep seeing him.* He's everywhere today...I can't...*I can't do this,* Wil." Techno sobbed and Wilbur cried with him.

"I know...I keep hearing his voice today. But we need to be there, Tech." Wilbur's voice was muffled as the brunette leaned into his brother's shoulder.

"I don't know if I can." Techno pulled back and allowed the grief he felt fall openly down his face. This was his twin. He didn't need to be strong in front of Wilbur.

"We have to. For Theseus. *We failed* him, but we can be there to honor his memory..." Wilbur trailed off, his eyes shone with tears. The brunette wrapped his arms around his legs and let his head rest against his knees.

Techno put his head in his hands and crossed his legs. He leaned forward against his brother's side and the two sat there for a long time in the middle of Wilbur's floor.

There were no words to describe the pain they felt. The pain the entire kingdom had endured that night. Yes, eventually they had been able to move on with their lives and have brief moments where they felt happy, but the pain of Theseus's death was a permanent scar that could never heal.

Wilbur lifted his head from his knees and reached down to pull something from his pocket. He brought it up and let the necklace dangle in front of his tired expression. Techno looked up at what Wilbur had and flinched at the sight of Theseus's pendant.

Wilbur's voice broke as he spoke, "I miss him."

"Me too."

There was a knocking at the door and neither of them moved until a voice rang out.

"I know you're in there with Wil, Techno. Can I come in?" Tubbo called and the boys relaxed. Wilbur pocketed Theseus's necklace and answered, "Yeah, come on in."

Tubbo was one of the very few people who knew exactly what the pain of losing Theseus was like. He'd been raised with Theseus and had been just as close to him as Wilbur and Techno had been.

That night he'd lost his best friend.

And he wore that pain like a suit of armor.

The teen entered and Techno dropped his head as he always did whenever he saw Tubbo's marred skin.

My fault. All my fault.

The ram brushed his brown hair out of his ocean-blue eyes and gave the boys a sad smile. Tubbo had traded in his normal leather apron, goggles, and gloves for a black waistcoat with matching trousers for the memorial. The now sixteen-year-old had grown well, short but well. He was no longer the bright-eyed toddler that constantly clung to his father's side. Now he spent most of his time either working in his lab working on some new experiment or he was in the library doing research for said experiment.

The boy was brilliant and was already known across the kingdom for his inventions and contributions to science. Though Techno knew that was only half of what he did. The prince lifted his head to look at the boy and saw the dark circles under his eyes, confirming that the teen hadn't slept again. He had spent all night in the library with Ranboo looking for new leads on Theseus.

Even after all these years, he'd never given up hope that his best friend was still alive.

"It's time to get ready, your highnesses. Dad says the memorial starts in an hour." The expression he wore was a solemn one and Techno could tell he wanted nothing more than to lock himself in his room and grieve for the little boy he used to run down the long palace halls without a care in the world with.

Blond and brunette heads bounced from room to room, playing hide-and-seek, bothering Theseus's older brothers when they were doing schoolwork, forcing the guard to break their normal stoic expressions and cause them to crack a grin at the childrens' antics.

The list goes on. His laughter echoes through his mind like a song he couldn't remember the lyrics to. Hazy and fading a little more with each passing year.

His face in Tubbo's memory now resembled the multiple portraits of the boy with his family that decorated the castle, but he could no longer picture as he'd been when he was alive-*before he went missing*.

So yes, he wanted to grieve today. He wanted to spend the entire day locked up in his room and ignore the whole fucking world.

But today he had to put on the same mask they all had to wear today. The mask that said, "I am okay. I am fine. I miss him but I have moved on and stayed strong."

A mask of lies.

Wilbur nodded and stood up from the floor. He walked over to his dresser and grabbed the outfit he'd laid out the night before. Techno noticed Wilbur's hands shook as he took the dark clothing in his hands. He stared at the outfit as if he wished it'd just vanish from view.

Before he went into his bathroom he turned to Techno and Tubbo and said in a tired, aggrieved tone, "With each passing year the world grows older. But not Theseus. Theseus will be four forever and we mourn for the life he never got to live."

"And I mourn for myself, for sometimes I think they forgot to bury me with him."

With that, Wilbur shut the door and left Tubbo and Techno to process his words. Techno turned to him and frankly, the young ram looked like a kicked puppy. He stood to his feet and offered an arm to him, a rare gesture.

Tubbo took it and Techno held him as close as he could. He rested his head atop his, careful to avoid his growing horns that were beginning to curve like his father's. Tubbo had been holding it together all day and he needed a moment. Techno was happy Tubbo was comfortable enough for him to be the one he could fall apart with.

Technoblade had pulled himself together already and knew he would shed no more tears that day. *He had to be strong.* He was always strong. It was what he was known for. The strong stoic warrior that people knew to fear and respect. One day, he would rule alongside his brother and take up the role of general while his brother picked up the more political side.

They were the perfect team.

Tubbo sobbed into his shirt and Techno found his throat tight with emotion once more. Tubbo was now the closest thing he had to a little brother. Even if he'd accidentally blown half his face off, Tubbo saw Wilbur and Techno as family. Tubbo was his second chance.

He wasn't a replacement for Theseus though. *No one could ever replace him.*

“It hurts. *It hurts still.*” Tubbo cried into his shirt. Techno swallowed back his own pain and replied, “I know it does, kid. I know it’s still just as painful as it was that night. But he loved you like a brother, never forget that.”

Tubbo nodded and then pulled away. He used his sleeve to wipe the tears from his eyes and gave the man a weak smile, “My memories of him get hazier and hazier every year but I can still see his smile so clearly in my mind. I’d give anything to see it again.”

Technoblade nodded at that, not trusting himself to speak for fear he might cry again. He felt his chest’s sorrow at the boy’s words and it only made him feel worse. But he’d allow it for the day. Today was one of the few days in the year that he’d allow himself to be vulnerable.

Wilbur finally appeared from the bathroom dressed in a black button-up and tie with dark pants. Mourning clothes. Technoblade knew he’d probably wear something similar unless something had already been picked out for him.

Most of the time he wore what he wanted but for special events like this, he’d find it was easier not to argue over it.

His twin’s face broke at the sight of Tubbo’s watery expression. He turned to his brother and said, “I’ll sit with him for a bit. Go get changed, Tech.”

He nodded, swallowing back his own emotions as he left the room. As Techno entered the hallway a voice called out, surprised,

“Your highness, *uh...*” Ranboo stuttered a bit startled. Clearly, he hadn’t expected the man to be out of his room on a day like this. He nearly dropped the books he was holding and fumbled for a moment to straighten them in his arms.

The prince gave him a small smile, “Tubbo is with Wilbur if you were wondering. I’m sure he needs you right now.”

Technoblade knew what Ranboo was. The prince of the End dimension, something that the tall lanky sixteen-year-old rarely liked to mention. The title really didn’t hold much weight considering the End had been closed off for years. No one had come through the portal in a long time.

Ranboo's wings were proof of his heritage. Large black dragon wings that shimmered a faint violet hung from his back. Usually, Ranboo kept them in his back during the day and let them out at night, but not today it seemed.

Today it seemed he was almost proud to show them.

The sad truth of it was, that he would never fly unless he had an attachment to his wing made. Which was something Tubbo worked tirelessly on.

When the boy was young he had been targeted by a group of men who had seen the enderling. Ranboo never told him what had happened after that but when his wings had emerged, the right wing had been practically shredded.

Tubbo could've cared less about where the hybrid had come from. Ranboo had been there for him the day after Theseus had been taken and hadn't left his side since. The two had been inseparable since that night, always within the vicinity of each other, even now eleven years later.

Looking at the boy more closely, he noticed wasn't wearing his normal getup of his long muted purple coat with the cloak that apparently Theseus had given to him the night he disappeared around his neck. Today he wore a simple black suit that showed off both his tail and wings.

The now-sixteen-year-old had never forgotten what his brother had done for him the day he'd died- *disappeared*. According to Ranboo, if it hadn't been for Theseus, his own brother, Jack, probably would've died.

It was a debt that Ranboo had said himself he could never repay.

"I know he is. But I'm more concerned about you, Techno. How are you?" The boy asked, his voice gentle as he spoke to his mentor. What few knew is that Techno had been secretly been teaching the boy how to fight. He was his student and he cared a great deal about him. He knew Ranboo wanted to find Theseus and had never given up hope like Wilbur and he had,

"I'm fine, kid." Techno's voice cracked as he spoke and Ranboo's eyes softened, "Techno, you don't need to be strong today. I know how much he meant to you."

"I said I'm fine." The prince's voice came out harsh and cold, and the enderling flinched at his words. Technoblade sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. *Nicely done.*

He could already feel Chat yelling at him for hurting Ranboo's feelings. The pink-haired man softened his expression and apologized, "Sorry...that came out rude. I just...*sorry.*"

Before Ranboo could respond Technoblade had already fled into his room, shame bubbling in his gut. He slammed the door a bit too loudly and pressed his back against it. He let himself slide down the spruce door until he hit the ground.

The man leaned his head back against the door and said to his chat, "Yeah, I know...I suck. But you know what? *So does this entire fucking day.*"

His chat muttered back in agreement.

"I'm never sure of what to say when I come to visit you, other than that I'm sorry. Which I'm sure by now you've grown tired of hearing."

The man chuckled weakly. He sits in front of a simple grave with no engravings written upon it. The grave sat underneath a willow tree he had planted not long after everything. It was a quiet place, much too quiet for the child it was dedicated to.

He hadn't wanted to build a headstone for him for a long time, thinking that it was a sign he was giving up on finding either of them.

But Wilbur eventually wore him down on it, insisting it could just be a private grave for them to come and visit. Technoblade wasn't too keen on it and Tubbo had been very upset about it, but ultimately he yielded and allowed a section of his wife's garden to be turned into a memorial for Theseus.

“It’s a memorial, not a funeral. He’s not dead.” The then ten-year-old Tubbo had argued with tears streaming down his newly marred face, still partially covered with bandages.

“A memorial is just a funeral without a body.” Wilbur snapped back.

“Sometimes I wonder if you can really hear me, or if you’re even there at all. Probably not, I’m sure your mother keeps you close at her side.” He drops his head, his eyes filling with tears at the mention of her, “If you are truly gone...then that’s where I tell myself you are. I haven’t given up though. *I won’t ever give up.*”

“If you’re still alive, my son, then I’ll find you. I’ll find you and bring you home. I meant what I said that night.” With that, the winged man placed a single yellow flower in front of his youngest son’s headstone.

He looked up to the sky and sighed. It was too bright and beautiful out for such a dreadful day as this one. Philza turned back to the grave and noticed something was peeking out from behind it.

He picked it up with a puzzled expression as what appeared to be a broken and rusted piano string sat in his hands. The ends appeared to have been snapped, probably due to years of use.

Phil just couldn’t for the life of him figure out what it was doing behind his son’s grave. And then his heart sank, Theseus had loved the piano. Especially when he got to play it with either his mother or Tubbo.

Perhaps it was a cruel irony that something his son loved would lay battered and broken in his hands.

“*Dad.*” Phil turned to see his eldest standing a few feet away with a flower of his own in his hands, a white chrysanthemum.

The emperor frowned and placed the piano string back behind the grave. He looked at Wilbur and said sadly, “Do you remember the day I found you and your brother?”

Wilbur nodded, tilting his head slightly curious as to why his father would bring up *that day*.

“You were both so small, so fragile. I felt if I held you too tight you might shatter in my arms. Especially Techno, he was *so tiny*. But at the same time, I knew how strong you were and would become even then. You had this fight in you to keep one another alive.”

“Yeah well, we all know how *that* turned out,” Wilbur said with a note of sourness. Philza shook his head, “You’re still here though. Theseus had the same fight. That’s why... That’s why I beli-”

“*Don’t, Dad*. Don’t say it. I can’t hear it right now. *Not today*.” Wilbur’s hand clenched tightly around the flower stem, his face was pained. Phil stood to his feet and looked up at his son who was taller than him now. He gently pressed his hand to the side of his face and Wilbur’s squeezed his eyes shut.

“Okay, I won’t say it then.” His head dropped and he looked at the grass he was standing on as he tried to hold back grief, “I’m sorry I couldn’t save him, Wilbur. I tried... *I really tried*.”

Wilbur shook his head and placed his hand on his father’s own that rested on his cheek. He argued, “You took a sword to the stomach for him, Phil. If it wasn’t for Mum you’d be dead. *It’s not your fault*.”

Phil moved his hand down to his shoulder and looked him straight in the eye, his voice serious, “It’s not your fault either, Wilbur.”

A tear fell down Wilbur’s cheek at his father’s words. He bit the inside of his cheek as he recalled that night,

“Bastard grabbed me by the hair with one hand and dragged me across the room like I weighed nothing. I remember seeing him grin when I looked up as he started to kick me in my ribs. If it hadn’t been for Theseus struggling so much who knows what else he would’ve done. *My four-year-old brother fought harder than I did*.”

“You were just a child. I should’ve done more. Should’ve been better prepared.” Phil said mournfully.

“You couldn’t have known something would happen to Theseus, Dad.”

The words struck him as painfully as the sword had that night. At that moment, Phil knew it was time. His son was grown and ready to hear the truth about the visions. He deserved to know how he failed.

The emperor didn’t attempt to hide the guilt in his eyes. And Wilbur caught it almost instantly as he always did, his face became one of disbelief.

“Dad?” Wilbur asked tensely, his shoulders stiffened and his voice strained in his throat.

Philza didn’t answer. Wilbur’s eyes widened at the knowing look on his father’s face.

“Phil, what...*what does that look mean?*” His son’s face had gone pale.

“Wilbur, I need you to listen to m-”

“*You didn’t know.* You couldn’t have known. *Tell me you didn’t know.*” Wilbur jerked away from his father, his eyes still filled with denial.

“When I defeated the dragon and went through the portal, I was given a vision. I saw you and your brothers and then...” Philza’s hands shook as he recounted the events of the vision to his son for many long minutes. Wilbur’s fists slowly clenched tighter and tighter as he looked at the man who had raised him.

He had always seen his father on a pedestal, incapable of doing wrong. He was the hero of the End, the emperor of the Antarctic Empire. *He was his dad.*

And he had kept the truth from him. He had lied to him *for years.*

He felt his world fall apart around him as the awful truth sank in, “Theseus...he told you about the masked man?”

Wilbur felt his stomach turn nauseously when Phil nodded, “I had no control once I realized the vision was coming true, it was as if someone had flipped a switch in my brain and I became a passenger in my own body. It wasn’t till I reached where the vision ended that I regained control and that’s when...well you know...”

“You could’ve told us. *You could’ve told me.*” Wilbur’s voice came out as a whisper. The man was fighting so hard not to scream at his father, but the rage bubbling in his chest was making it near impossible.

“You were just a child, Wilbur. I couldn’t burden you with something like that.” Phil shook his head and reached out for the brunette’s shoulder. Wilbur grabbed his wrist before he could reach him and said in a deadly calm voice,

“If you had told me, he would still be here, Phil. *If you had fucking told me, my brother would still be alive.*”

His father’s face went deathly pale.

“Theseus saw the man you described at the ball that night. He told me about it and I *dismissed him.*” Wilbur shoved his father away and buried his hands in his hair, “I told him he was *safe*, Dad. I told him he hadn’t actually seen him.”

“And when Theseus woke up from a bad dream about the man...I...” Wilbur was hyperventilating now as the memories swarmed his brain. He sunk to his knees and felt his father kneel down next to him, unsure of how to calm the brunette down when he was the target of his rage.

Wilbur didn’t need to calm down. He needed to yell, “I told him to go back to bed! *That it was just a dream!*”

“And...I didn’t stop him when I saw him leave the room to go find you...” Wilbur’s voice broke finally and he could feel the rage leaking down his face as streams of tears.

“It’s not your fault, Wil...” He heard Phil say and at that moment he felt the last thread snap.

“No. *No, it fucking isn’t.* Goddammit, Phil. Did Kristin know too? Is that why she fucking abandoned us?” Wilbur hissed and felt a pinch of remorse when his father’s eyes hardened.

The man hung his head low and said coldly, “You can blame me all you want, Wilbur. But I don’t *ever* want to hear you talk about your mother like that again. *She did not abandon us.*”

“Then where is she, Dad? *Because I sure as shit haven’t seen her.*”

Suddenly, Philza summoned his wings out from his back and Wilbur flinched as he always did when he saw his father’s revival mark.

Unlike Wilbur and Technoblade who had been each given a stark white streak in their hair to symbolize that they had been brought back to life, Phil’s was much different.

“Your mother had been allowed to revive you and your brother. But she was forbidden from bringing anyone else back to life.”

Philza spread his wings and Wilbur looked at the top part of his right-wing that trailed into his back. Unlike the rest of his feathers which were jet black, about a fourth of his right wing was a light grey.

“She gave up everything to save my life and I will not have you accusing her of abandoning us. If I hadn’t gotten myself killed, maybe she could’ve saved Theseus. I’ll never know.” Phil’s voice caught in his throat but the anger in his eyes shook Wilbur to his core.

“If you’re going to be angry, *then be angry at me.* I know I failed you and Techno and I’ll regret it for the rest of my life.”

Wilbur bit the inside of his cheek until he felt the sting of iron in his mouth. His hands shook at his side and the rage that had been sitting inside his chest had nowhere to go.

He couldn't move, he didn't even think he could breathe. The air around him was suffocating and the look on his father only made the valve that was keeping him from falling apart only shut tighter.

"I hate you..." He rasped, letting the venom hiss out of him before closing the valve once more. It was a lie and even Phil knew it but it didn't stop the look of absolute heartbreak on his father's face.

Wilbur just wanted someone else to hurt as much as he did right now. The guilt of his brother's death would eat him alive forever and there was nothing he could do about it.

He just wanted it to stop.

He needed it to stop.

He needed to get out of here.

So Wilbur did the one thing he could do better than anyone. *He ran.*

Chapter End Notes

oh hey phil--*gunshot*

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart.
<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram @_emiartse

See you guys next chapter;)

Radio Static

Chapter Notes

TW: Implied/Referenced Self-Harm at the end of the chapter. Nothing graphic just bruising.
Word Count: 5,400

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Tubs...Tubbo, I know I can’t possibly be that comfortable to nap on.” Ranboo chuckled as he brushed his fingers through his best friend’s hair. The two were still sitting on the floor in Prince Wilbur’s room who still hadn’t come back from going to speak to the Emperor.

“Shh...your bony knees are the perfect headrest,” Tubbo mumbled, eliciting another laugh from the enderman-dragon... *whatever*. He usually just referred to himself as an enderman. It was just easier.

“Yeah well my legs are beginning to lose feeling and as much as I enjoy being used as a pillow, we are going to be late if you don’t wake up,” Ranboo said and heard the boy sigh before sitting up. The enderman snorted at the sight of Tubbo’s mussed curls that had flattened on one side of his head.

“The fuck are you laughing at? I’ve seen you break brand new hairbrushes before because of your bedhead,” Tubbo teased, pushing the boy away.

Ranboo rolled his eyes and ignored Tubbo’s protests when he began using his fingers to fix his hair. “Are you feeling any better?”

“Yeah, I needed that power nap. Thanks, bossman.” Tubbo exhaled and then stood to his feet. He took a moment to brush out the wrinkles in his suit and then extended a hand to Ranboo, pulling the lanky teen to his feet.

Tubbo extended his arms out and asked, “How do I look? I don’t have dried snot stuck to my face, do I?”

“First off, *ew*. Second off, your eyes are still a bit red but they should clear up by the time we get to the great hall.”

“Ranboo dear, you are supposed to tell me how pretty I am. You’re lacking in the romance department today” Tubbo joked as he failed to properly bat his eyelids at the enderman.

Ranboo simply gave him an amused expression and leaned forward towards him, “Apologies, I wasn’t aware that my goal was to woo my research partner.”

Tubbo snickered as he replied, “No wonder you’re failing at it. Keep it up and you’ll wind up a divorcé at sixteen.”

Ranboo gasped dramatically and placed his hand over his heart, “Tubbo you married me? Why didn’t you tell me? I would’ve asked my siblings to come to our platonic wedding.”

“Oh primes, could you imagine my father walking me down the aisle?”

“I think we should get married just so I could see that. That is if the Chancellor doesn’t throw me in the ocean for trying to marry his son.”

The brunette shook his head laughing and agreed, “Yeah that’s a valid fear. Though...I don’t know, I think I could see you getting his blessing...after a decade or two. Baby steps first though, maybe take me out on a date before we tie the knot.”

Ranboo barked out a laugh, “What? The hundreds of hours we spend together pouring over books in the library don’t count? I thought the fireplace was rather romantic.”

“Ah yes, because looking for new leads on the man that kidnapped my childhood best friend is so romantic. Remind me to break out the candlesticks and grape juice next time, ” Tubbo said offhandedly and then paled once the words registered. Ranboo stiffened at the words and Tubbo’s face fell.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that... *sorry*.” He put his face in his hands and the room was deathly quiet for a long moment until Tubbo felt Ranboo press a hand to his back comfortingly.

“Everyone fought that night to save Theseus,” Tubbo whispered into his palms and Ranboo’s heart ached at the words. He wanted to argue back but at that moment Tubbo sat back up and said, “But no, not me. I fell asleep and woke up to the sound of him screaming. My father woke up with me and told me to hide under Phil’s desk.”

“I stayed under that desk for over an hour, too scared to move. Too scared to breathe. I wasn’t thinking about Theseus. I was only thinking about how scared I was that whatever monster was out there would come for me next.

“And then...when it was over when the screams finally stopped. The door opened and I’ll never forget the sadness in my father’s voice when he told me it was safe to come out.”

Tubbo leaned over into Ranboo’s side and the enderling wrapped an arm around him, “There was nothing you could’ve done Tubbo. We were children. You know what he did to his majesty, the princes, and to your father. You did the right thing by listening to your dad.”

Ranboo could feel Tubbo’s tears stinging against his skin but he ignored it.

“I was supposed to be in that room with him that night. But he kept fucking kicking me in his sleep like an ass,” Tubbo chuckled tearfully and then frowned. “So I got up and went to my dad and I never saw him again.”

“I’m glad you did. He could’ve killed you in your sleep and snuck off with him without waking anyone up. If you hadn’t left the room it’s possible we would’ve never known who took him.”

Tubbo wanted to argue so badly but he knew the cycle. He went through it every year. The endless cycle of blame that everyone who had been there that night felt. If he continued to blame himself, then he would never be able to move on.

He knew it. Ranboo knew it. They’d had this conversation too many times to count.

So for once, Tubbo let it drop.

There was a knock at the door and the two boys pulled away from one another to see Technoblade peering his head in. The prince's eyes locked with Ranboo and Tubbo saw something flit over his expression for a moment before the man composed himself and walked into the room.

"Where's Wilbur?" He voiced and Tubbo shrugged, "He went to go get his majesty about twenty minutes ago and never came back. I assume he's still with him."

Techno nodded, his eyes glued to the floor. There was something else bothering him and Tubbo furrowed his brow.

"Are you alright, Techno?" Tubbo asked, "You seem...off. Did something happen?"

"It's merely a consequence of the date, Tubs. I'll be fine." Techno brushed off quickly and then sputtered. "I'll go find Wil. You two should head to the Great Hall. I'm sure Schlatt is wondering where you are."

Before he could respond, the prince had already fled the room leaving Ranboo and Tubbo staring at each other with a perplexed expression.

"You know, I can see you hiding under there, *limo pequeño*," The dark-haired man mused to himself as he set a roast that was freshly out of the oven and ready to be carved. He was in a secluded area of the kitchen, away from the hustle and bustle of the normal staff who were all working on food for Theseus' memorial. Being able to work by himself from time to time was just a perk of being the head chef for the palace.

Quackity's eyes flitted downwards and he smiled to himself when a pair of bright green eyes framed by thick square glasses peered back at him.

The eight-year-old boy frowned back, "How did you know?! I was being so quiet!"

He bent down a bit so he could fondly ruffle the boy's strawberry blond hair. He then replied, "I could see your shoes sticking out from under the table, Charlie. You weren't exactly hidden."

Charlie hopped up from underneath the table and hoisted himself up on top of it. He made sure to keep himself a good distance away from the roast his guardian was carving for what he assumed was the royal family's lunch after the memorial.

"Aren't you supposed to be helping Niki right now with pastries?" Quackity asked, not looking up from his work.

Charlie nodded. "I did for a while, and then Mr. Jack said he'd help with the rest and told me to go play."

The man let out a hum. "And did you? There are plenty of kids who play ball in the alleyway outside the gate."

The boy fiddled with his hands and let his head drop. "They don't want to play with me. They said I was too stupid to figure out the rules of the game."

Quackity felt his wings tense behind him as anger swirled inside his chest. He quickly put down his carving knife and wiped his hands off with a rag. The man then rested his hands on his ward's shoulders forcing the boy to look up at him. His voice was soft as he spoke,

"You're not stupid, Charlie. You're a very smart kid. One of the smartest kids I've ever met. Fuck what those little shits outside said." Charlie sniffled and his eyes filled with tears.

Quackity's heart hurt at the sight as he continued, "They only said that because they're jealous of you. You have food, a home, and an education that they can only ever dream of having. They only said it to hurt you. You are not stupid, Charlie."

The blonde nodded and Quackity circled his arms around him and pulled him into a hug. "Forget those brats. You stay right here with me, okay? You can help me make lunch. I'll even let you use the stovetop."

Charlie pulled away and took off his glasses so he could wipe his eyes. The boy gave Quackity a weak smile and nodded. "Can I help make the stew?"

Quackity smiled. "Of course, you can, kid."

Suddenly the two noticed the entire kitchen had gone completely quiet and Quackity quirked an eyebrow curiously. He lifted up Charlie from the table and set him down on the floor. Quackity smiled when the child instinctively grabbed his hand as they made their way to the main area of the kitchen where the rest of his staff were.

Quackity raised his eyebrows at the sight of Prince Wilbur standing at the threshold of the door, searching the crowd of people for him.

"Your Highness?" Quackity called out and Wilbur's eyes shot over to his. The look he gave Quackity was distressed and his brown eyes widened as he motioned him over. The prince entered the secluded area of the kitchen and Quackity turned back to his staff instructing them to continue with their tasks.

Charlie pulled the sliding panel shut, allowing his guardian and the prince privacy. He then quickly ducked back underneath the table, partially out of sight.

Quackity chuckled at the boy but didn't say anything more instead looking to his childhood friend who appeared to be rather shell-shocked. His eyes flitted downward and he noticed Wilbur was carrying a suspicious-looking knapsack in his arms, with what Quackity could only assume were clothes and a few other items.

What the hell happened...?

"Wil? Oi, your Highness?" Quackity waved a hand in front of his face, trying to pull him out of his own head. "Wilbur, look at me, man. Take a deep breath, okay?"

Quackity gently took hold of the prince's hands, letting the bag in his arms drop to their feet. He squeezed them in his own a few times, attempting to spark a reaction. *Still nothing*. Finally, he looked down at Charlie beneath the table and then eyed the large empty cooking pot resting on one of the counters.

Charlie looked over at it then back to Quackity and nodded, realizing what he was asking. The boy crawled out from under the table and then whacked the pot off the counter letting it clatter loudly against the tiled floor.

Wilbur practically jumped two feet off the ground, his wing nearly spreading out involuntarily from the start.

“There he is.”

“Fucking primes!” Wilbur swore, eyeing the child in the corner who was suddenly trying to look as innocent as possible. “What the fu—You scared the hell out of me, Q.”

Quackity laughed, “Sorry, man. You weren’t responding and you had this blank look in your eyes so you worried me.”

Wilbur looked down and nervously scratched the back of his neck before stammering, “O-Oh... sorry about that. I’ve got...well I’ve got a lot on my mind.”

Quackity nodded. He imagined anyone’s head would be clouded on a day like this.

“Anything you need to talk about? I doubt you’re here for the roast,” he said, trying to cut through the tension a bit.

It worked and Wilbur’s distressed expression softened a bit to allow a smile.

“Alas I did not come for your cooking, Q.” Wilbur’s eyes flitted upward to meet his own. “I’m here because I need your help.”

Quackity shifted his weight onto one leg and crossed his arms, “Why do I get the feeling you’re about to do something stupid? Aren’t you supposed to be with your family right now, *your Highness?* ”

Wilbur's eyes hardened a bit but Quackity could tell the anger wasn't directed at him. "Quackity, we all know that Theseus' memorial is for the kingdom, not his family. "

"And so... you want to what? Ditch the ceremony?" Quackity asked incredulously, "Your father will send half the guard out searching for you within the hour."

His friend looked down for a moment, unsure for a moment if he should say what he was thinking. Wilbur caught it almost immediately like he always did.

"Say it, Q. We're standing on equal ground as we always have been." *You softhearted motherfuc—*

Sometimes Quackity forgot about his best friend's origins. Wilbur had come from nothing just as he did. From day one, Wilbur had never regarded himself as more important than Quackity. Other people did of course, but not him. To Wilbur, Quackity's opinion was worth its weight in gold, no matter how harsh it might be.

"Today of all days is not the day to be running off without notice, Wilbur. You know that, I *know* that you do." Quackity said firmly and then added, "Why are you trying to hurt your family? This isn't like you."

Wilbur looked taken aback by how accurate Quackity had read him and quickly replied with, " *It's not ...I'm not...*" He grumbled and then barked back, "How the hell did you gather all that?"

"I've known you a long time, Wil. I can tell when you're being an idiot." Quackity answered nonchalantly and Wilbur lightly scoffed.

He was about to answer when he suddenly remembered there was a kid in the room.

Wilbur looked at Charlie who was staring at them from underneath the table and smiled, "Hey kid, if you go bug Niki for a cupcake, I'll give you fifteen silver."

Charlie's eyes lit up at the promise of money and in a split second, he had sprinted from the room and out of sight.

"Nice to know I've taught him well." Quackity laughed and Wilbur didn't miss the fondness in his eyes. He fished out the money from his pocket and handed it to the man to give to Charlie later.

"You should formally adopt him, you know. He thinks the world of you, Q." Wilbur suggested and Quackity paused, briefly distracted by the thought of being Charlie's actual parent. Then he remembered that this wasn't the time to be thinking about that.

"Don't change the subject, this is still about you, Wilbur."

The brunette sighed, looking very uncomfortable at that moment, his eyes locked on the floor. Quackity was about to drop the issue when Wilbur finally spoke, "It's selfish. I know it is, but right now *I don't really give a damn*."

Wilbur looked up at Quackity and said coldly, "I'm in pain. I'm grieving. And I'm so fucking *angry* at Phil right now. I can't tell you why...not now. Not while I'm this upset. It would just be too much." His eyes were pleading as he spoke and Quackity could feel his resolve crumbling like dust, "I can't go to the memorial and I can't be anywhere near this palace right now. Please, Q. Please just trust me and let me go. The kitchen backdoor is the only exit that I won't be stopped at." The man implored and Quackity stared at Wilbur for a long moment, his expression unreadable.

"I swear...if I get fired because of you, I will hunt you down myself." Quackity threatened half-jokingly. Wilbur's expression lit up like the sun and Quackity smiled, a warm feeling blossoming in his chest.

Then just as quickly as his joy had appeared it quickly morphed into mischief. Wilbur grinned impishly and leaned over a bit towards him. "*Promise?*"

If Quackity could've rolled his eyes any farther back he would've.

"Idiot," Quackity replied giving out a dry laugh, "Go on, you can get changed in my room. Take Ossium with you and try not to get yourself killed."

Wilbur placed his hand over his heart playfully and said, “Aw...you do care.”

“Trust me, I’m caring less and less by the second,” Quackity joked and then suddenly looked down at the ground as he added, “But uh...don’t do anything stupid okay?”

Wilbur’s eyes softened and he smiled. “I’ll be safe, Q. Promise.”

He turned to leave but before he could Quackity added, “I won’t keep this a secret from Techno if he asks, Wil.”

The man nodded, his back turned to him, and said, “I know you won’t. I’m not asking you to. I’ll see you later, Quackity.”

Then he was gone and Quackity wondered if he had made the right decision.

Theseus’s memorial ceremony was as Wilbur had put it one year, “*poetically depressing*” and to be honest? Techno couldn’t agree more.

The event of Theseus’s memorial extended to his birthday, which had been only a few days after he’d been kidnapped. The kingdom would normally spend the next few days decorating L’manburg for his birthday while his family mourned.

Yeah, Theseus’s sixth birthday had been one memory he was glad Chat had blocked out for him. He didn’t want to remember just how loud his father’s cries for his wife and son had been from his bedroom.

He didn’t want to remember the way Tubbo had apparently hid under his father’s bed, too scared to even breathe.

He didn't want to remember how his twin had sat in the rocking chair by Theseus' bed for hours unmoving, endlessly staring at the emerald necklace in his hand.

And according to his father, Technoblade had spent hours entirely motionless in the library atop one of the bookshelves that were pressed up against one of the walls beneath a window. At least until Phil had climbed up and brought him down.

Even now eleven years later Technoblade still felt that overwhelming urge to run. To forget what had happened that night and just hide himself away from the world.

As he entered the Great Hall, that's exactly what he wished he'd done. It was the same as it was every year. Filled with important people who probably had only met Theseus once but had never spoken to him. Then there were people like the Dukes Mumbo Jumbo, Grian, and now Scar who hadn't known Theseus but knew his fellow friends had met him the night he disappeared. They had come every year since and had always managed to bring a small smile to his face.

Techno's eyes flitted over the crowd as he searched over a sea of unfamiliar faces until finally, he found the Chancellor and his father speaking to one another in the corner of the room near one of the several banquet tables scattered across the room for people to sit at.

There was one table that sat on a large platform in the back of the room to keep the emperor and his family safely separated from the crowd of people.

It was a precaution that Phil loved to ignore, choosing instead to speak to his people directly, much to Puffy and Sam's dismay.

Schlatt never strayed too far from his father's side for this very reason thankfully. Techno scanned the room again and found where Tubbo and Ranboo were in the crowd and then frowned.

Where is Wilbur?

He found Sapnap and Foolish along with a woman with long dark brown hair and a kind face. He had never met her personally but he was pretty sure her name was Tina. There was another person standing next to her, a brunette whose back was turned to him. For a moment he thought he'd found his brother but then the man turned and he grimaced.

It was only Karl, a traveler from the south that had arrived a few years back, met Sapnap, and hadn't left his side since. He remembered for a time Sapnap, Karl, and Quackity had been quite close but around a year ago something in their relationship changed. Now the only interactions Techno had seen between the three were dark glares exchanged when they thought the prince wasn't looking.

Wilbur's relationship with Sapnap had also taken a hit around that time and Techno had just assumed he'd decided to side with Quackity. It was a bit sad to see, considering his twin had known Sapnap since the first few weeks after their arrival. Techno had never been close to the man and he'd never asked Quackity or Wilbur what had happened. It wasn't really his business anyway.

"Your Highness?" A voice from his right called causing him to jolt a bit as he was torn from his thoughts. He turned and relaxed when he saw it was only Connor, a knight who had been working at the palace for a couple of years.

"Sorry didn't mean to startle you, but the Emperor is asking for you," he said, and Techno nodded and allowed the man to escort him through the crowd. As they got close he saw his father look up at him from his conversation with the Chancellor and give him a strained smile.

And it was at that exact moment that he felt his connection with his chat snap like a violin string that had been wound too tightly. The prince stumbled suddenly feeling violently off balance without the constant hum of activity that he'd grown used to and eventually relied upon to keep himself grounded in reality.

It wasn't normal. It felt like he'd suddenly lost a limb. He felt detached.

He felt like he was floating aimlessly through a sea of people.

A hand gripped tightly on his shoulder keeping him from stumbling to the ground as Connor expertly maneuvered the prince through the crowd.

Techno shuttered, it felt like every eye in the room was on him. In reality, only a handful of people had been close by when he nearly collapsed. He'd have to remember to thank Connor later for getting him through the room and over to his father without creating a scene.

His ears were ringing loudly as he felt Connor hand him over to the emperor and Schlatt who quickly helped him through one of the side doors that led to a private sitting area.

“Chat?” Techno rasped as they sat him on one of the couches, “*Where are you?*”

“Techno?” Phil called and the prince felt a hand against his cheek as he struggled to focus back on reality.

“It’s so *quiet* . I can’t hear them.” Techno bit his tongue to keep his voice from wobbling.

Something was wrong .

He tried to focus back on the last thing he heard chat muttered before cutting out. The only thing he could think of was that a few of them had called out for him to find Wilbur and then he’d looked up at Phil and they went silent.

Techno took a deep breath and let himself calm down. He searched around his head for a moment and let out a sigh of relief when he found the link still intact. Chat wasn’t gone, they’d shut him out.

“... *ur highness?* ” He heard Schlatt call and then heard his father tell him to go and fetch Bad.

It was at that moment his head snapped up and he protested, “No don’t. I’m fine.” Techno winced, feeling his voice was suddenly ten times louder than it should be.

“You don’t seem fine, highness,” Schlatt argued but didn’t move to leave.

Techno shook his head, “He wouldn’t know what to do anyway. It just startled me is all. They aren’t normally the ones to shut me out. I just wasn’t expecting it.”

He wasn't lying. It was frustrating but he'd blocked Chat out before so he could think many times in the past. He could handle being alone in his brain. Though a warning would've been nice.

"Are you sure, son?" Phil asked, looking extremely concerned and Techno nodded.

"I'm fine. I need to go drag Wilbur out of the library anyway." Techno lied, he knew he wouldn't find him there. If Wilbur had in fact ditched the ceremony (which would be extremely hypocritical of him given their earlier conversation) then he was almost positive the man was with Quackity. He looked up at Phil and his expression furrowed when he saw a pained look on his face at the mention of his twin.

"Unless...there is a reason I shouldn't?" Techno asked warily and Phil stared at him for a long moment before shaking his head, "No. Go find Wil, I'm sure he needs to talk to you. Just try to bring him around at some point. I wouldn't be surprised however if he just wanted to be left alone."

Now Techno was really confused. Had his father and brother had an argument in the hour before Theseus's memorial? What could have possibly been said to him that caused Wilbur to miss his little brother's memorial?

"Is um...am I missing something?" Techno turned to Schlatt who looked equally confused.

"I'm sure your brother will fill you in. I just...I can't have this conversation again right now. And not when there are at least two hundred people in the room next to us. Just promise me you'll come to see me afterward. I'm sure we will have a lot to discuss."

Technoblade simply stared at him with a perplexed expression but didn't argue. Instead, he nodded and attempted to stand back to his feet. He felt a little less off balance but the lack of his chat was rather disorienting. He really hoped they'd be back sooner rather than later.

As he turned to leave he heard Phil call, "Techno?"

"Yeah, dad?" He answered, his hand on the handle of the door.

His father gave him a tired smile, “I love you, son. And I’m sorry.”

Techno didn’t know how to react to that and instead just replied, “Yeah, I love you too. I’ll see you tonight.”

With that, he quickly hurried out of the room.

As soon as the prince had left, Schlatt turned to the emperor and asked, “You told Wilbur about the visions, didn’t you?”

Phil let his shoulders slump but he didn’t deny it. “I just...I couldn’t lie to him anymore. Not when he kept telling me that I’d done all I could to save him.”

Schlatt pinched the bridge of his nose with his forefinger and his thumb and spoke as bluntly as he could, “I won’t lie, Phil. This was not the time to tell them about that. Especially not today.”

“I know,” Phil admitted and Schlatt scoffed as he moved to sit in the armchair next to the couch.

“I can’t imagine what exactly is going through their heads, especially Wilbur’s but I’m guessing he didn’t react well.”

“He told me that he hated me. Not that I blame him,” Phil said mournfully as he stared at the dark oak floorboards of the room.

“He didn’t mean that and you know it. He might be pretty fucking pissed off right now but neither of them could ever hate you. And especially not over a lie you told to protect them. It might take a while, but they’ll learn to accept it.”

Phil nodded and straightened in his seat, “I hope you’re right. I really do.” “Your majesty, I’m *always* right.” Schlatt grinned.

Phil let out a weak laugh, “If only that were true.”

“You know, Tommy. At some point tonight you’re gonna have to look me in the eye. You can’t stay mad at me forever.” Dream chimed as he took another bite of his dinner.

The late afternoon sun shone brightly through the window, illuminating Tommy’s golden hair even more than usual. The teen didn’t respond to Dream’s attempt to elicit a response from him, he instead looked down mournfully at the chicken on his plate and sighed.

Dream always forgets that I don’t eat meat.

The boy stabbed his fork into one of the potatoes rather violently and left it there.

He heard Dream sigh irritably as he finished his meal and set his dishes in the sink for Tommy to do later.

“Fine, act that way. You’re still gonna have to put up with me for the rest of the night, however, so get used to it. I’ll be gone in the morning anyway.”

Tommy perked up at that and tried to sound as jaded as he could as he asked, “...Where are you going?”

He heard Dream laugh, “So you do care about me, good to know.”

Tommy felt a pang in his chest at the sentence. Dream simply ignored the hurt look on the blonde’s face. “George and I will be on a trip for the next few days. Just another job, I should only be gone for about three days.”

Tommy tried to mentally tally the amount of food in the tower. He might have to skip a meal or two. *Damn.* He quickly stuffed another potato in his mouth.

“Relax kid, I stocked the pantry, you’ll be fine. All you have to do is ask me to get groceries, Tommy. It’s your own fault if they run out.”

“Right, sorry,” Tommy mumbled, suddenly really missing Crow. He hoped she had gotten her dinner by now. Twiddling the fork in his hand he skewered another potato then winced as he felt a sharp pain in his spine from his wings shifting around. He looked over at his brother who was no longer paying attention to him and thought.

Fuck it, I can only get into so much more trouble.

“Dream?” He called and the green-eyed man quirked his head up from the sword he was polishing.

“Can I take out my wings for a bit? They’re really hurting me right now. I won’t have them out long, just long enough for me to fix them up a bit.”

Dream sighed and Tommy could tell by the annoyed expression on his face he was about to tell him no when suddenly his eyes unexpectedly softened and he said, “Sure, but make it quick and shut the doors and windows. Stay upstairs and try not to get feathers everywhere would you?”

Tommy shoved another potato in his mouth and then shot up from his chair, grinning, “I won’t! Thank you!”

He could hear Dream chuckle as the boy raced upstairs and into his room. He was careful not to let the door slam and gently closed it. The moment it closed he felt his smile drop from his face and breathed out a sigh of relief.

As he worked quickly to shut every window in the room and started putting down towels. The happiness of getting to let out his wings had quickly been suppressed by the conversation he’d had earlier with Dream.

He would die in this tower. He was never leaving. He would be in pain every day for the rest of his sad excuse of a life.

It had been stupid of him to have hope for a better life in the first place.

The boy knelt to the floor and chucked his shirt harshly onto the floor as angry tears filled his eyes. He gritted his teeth as his wings fell from his back, but the pain was quickly overshadowed by the overwhelming relief he felt as he spread out his vibrantly red wings. He felt some skin break as he stretched and quickly pressed his hand behind his back and onto the wound before he got blood all over the floor. Tommy winced as he felt the skin close back up.

He looked down at his injured wrist from his altercation with Dream earlier. It was red and puffy and while bruising hadn't set in yet, he was almost positive it would be an ugly purplish-blue by tomorrow, that is if he didn't heal it. He grimaced at it and let the golden power fade away.

There wasn't a point in healing it was there? It was just a bruise and it was one he would proudly show off to Dream as his own form of rebellion.

Clumped-up feathers fell in droves from his wings that hadn't been properly preened in months and Tommy sighed at the patchy bald spots where feathers should've grown in but couldn't due to them always being in his back. He ran his fingers through his feathers as gently as he could trying to preen the more rough-looking areas. Hopefully, he had enough time to heal them a bit before Dream made him put them away.

Enough time...

Well, he had all the time in the fucking world now.

“What...what is the point...?” Tommy whispered to himself letting a loose feather fall from his hands and onto the floor.

“What is the point of any of this...?”

Chapter End Notes

teheheh we're almost there you guys.

Also I wanted to take a moment and thank you guys so much for all the fanart and attention this fic has received. We are now at 50k hits?!?!? WHICH IS WILD?!?!? also please never stop drawing fanart for this I love it so much and I cherish it.

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

See you guys next chapter;)

Awake My Soul

Chapter Notes

Word Count: 6,800

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3

Have fun;)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As the late afternoon sun peered through the leaves, the prince took a deep breath.

The crisp chill air of the dying embers of winter filled his lungs and he sighed, relieved he'd decided to do this after all. He gently ran his fingers over the ridge where Ossium's mane would be as they trekked through the woods. Ossium was Quackity's horse that he'd let him borrow for his outing in the woods. After all, he couldn't take Carl from the stables, his brother would murder him for touching his prized stallion.

The horse whinnied at the touch and Wilbur smiled as he trailed into a less dense part of the forest where the sun shone down warmly upon them. He was glad he'd decided to bring his trenchcoat, the nights in L'manburg got rather chilly. The brunette tugged his beanie more snugly over his ears and allowed Ossium to slow to a steady walk.

He'd been out here maybe a few hours, traveling deeper and deeper into the woods, relishing in the fact that he had no idea where he was now.

Good and lost. Perfect.

He'd eventually figure his way out and Wilbur knew how to keep himself alive for a while if he found himself truly lost. With each step, Wilbur felt the tension ebb away until finally, he felt truly and totally alone and far far away from the castle and the memories that lay within.

At some point in his trek, when the sun began to dip below the horizon he found himself singing to whatever wildlife would hear him,

*How fickle my heart and how woozy my eyes
I struggle to find any truth in your lies
And now my heart stumbles on things I don't know
My weakness I feel I must finally show
Lend me your hand and we'll conquer them all
But lend me your heart and I'll just let you fall
Lend me your eyes I can change what you see
But your soul you must keep, totally free
Awake my soul
Awake my soul*

“That’s a new one. When did you write that?”

An uncharacteristic squeal left Wilbur at the voice and he nearly fell off Ossium. His head whipped around to the source and he let out a sigh.

“Techno.”

“In the flesh,” his twin grinned, reigning in his own horse so it trotted next to Wilbur’s. The man was no longer wearing the somber mourning clothes he’d had on this morning and had instead changed into a more casual riding outfit like his own.

The brunette shook his head, perplexed. “How the hell did you find me?”

His brother quirked his head, “Are you really that surprised? If I can track down a wolf fifty miles away from home then I can certainly track you, Wilbur.”

“Hmph,” Wilbur scoffed, looking away for a moment before speaking, “Don’t bother trying to bring me home. I won’t go.”

“I know.”

The brunette’s head shot up at that. He sputtered, “You’re not going to stop me?”

“I mean...If it gets to the point that we’ve been out here two weeks, then maybe. But I understand why you’re doing this, Wilbur.” Techno looked down at the forest floor, his voice suddenly sad. “I just wish you’d trusted that I would’ve gone with you without question.”

Wilbur’s hand shot to his brother’s shoulder. “It’s not that. I promise. I know you think you know the reason I’m out here, but it’s not like that at all. Had everything gone normally I would’ve gone to the memorial.”

The horses continued their trek through the woods with the two princes riding side by side as Techno asked, “Then why? What happened?”

Wilbur’s eyes glazed over for a moment and Techno felt his heart begin to harden as he prepared for whatever blow his brother was about to deliver.

His brother sighed and spoke solemnly, “Phil— *dad* ... told me something new about the night we lost him.”

The brunette looked at Techno with a pained expression and Techno felt his stomach twist with anxiety. Wilbur lowered his hand and lamented, “Dad knew Theseus was in danger and didn’t tell us. He’s known for years.”

Techno stared at his brother as the words hung precariously in the air. His hands dropped from Wil’s shoulder and swung uselessly at his side as what Wilbur said sunk in. *No. No, that doesn’t make any sense.*

Why would he...?

“What?” Techno croaked and then winced when his voice wobbled on the word. His twin bit his lip as he spoke, as if just talking about it was like a knife to the gut.

“I went out to let him know the ceremony would be starting soon and I found him out by Theseus’ grave. The conversation went fine until I told him it wasn’t his fault we lost our brother.”

Wilbur sucked in a breath, “The *look* he gave me, Tech...I’ve never seen him look so vulnerable until that moment.”

That wasn’t true. There was only one other time in his life when he’d seen his father look that way...

His cries echoed throughout the room as he pulled himself onto his elbows, his ribs screaming at the movement. He managed to crawl his way from the corner of the room and panicked when he saw his twin’s unconscious figure.

Schlatt knelt at Technoblade’s side, examining the prince’s head for any signs of a bleed. Wilbur couldn’t help but notice the arrow embedded into Schlatt’s shoulder, freely bleeding. But the man didn’t seem to care.

“Wilbur...” A voice called and the prince turned to see his father lying in the doorway, a dark stain soaking through his yukata. Wilbur’s eyes widened in fear and he frantically began crawling toward his father and then cried out in pain as a loud cracking sound echoed throughout the room.

“Don’t move, your highness!” Schlatt called out, but Wilbur ignored him and continued crawling towards Phil until he was able to reach out and wrap his tiny hand around his. He turned his head up and saw his father staring back at him with an expression that would haunt him till the end of his days.

In his father’s eyes, he saw weakness. And it shook Wilbur to his very core.

Wilbur sighed as the memory faded from his mind. He looked over to his brother and said, “I think he wanted me to know. He just didn’t want to have to deal with the knowledge alone anymore.” He rubbed his eyes with his hands as he spoke, “Phil told me he had gotten a vision of Theseus telling him he was in danger years before any of us were born.” “Well...that’s vague...how would he have

known when it would happen?” Techno defended. Sure, it still felt like a mild sting of betrayal, but that was something forgivable. They had been children.

“I don’t know. I think in the vision Theseus was around the same age he was when he was taken, but he also said Theseus talked about the masked man to him that night.”

Now that made Techno’s back stiffen and Carl whined at the movement, clearly sensing his rider’s distress.

“He knew about the masked man?”

Wilbur nodded, his eyes dark. Techno tried to swallow back rage as best he could, but it was much harder to manage his emotions without his chat.

“Did he know he would take him?” Techno’s voice was low as he tried to keep it from shaking.

Wilbur looked up at the sky clouded by tree leaves and responded softly, “I...I don’t know. I don’t think so. I don’t think he knew what would happen. But it doesn’t excuse the fact that—”

“You’re upset because he didn’t tell us about the man...” Techno cut him off, his voice was suddenly hauntingly calm. He was mad, sure. Furious even, but what his father had done wasn’t done maliciously. He hadn’t told them because he wanted them to grow up without that fear looming over their heads.

It was just heartbreaking that by protecting Wilbur and him, Phil had failed to protect Theseus. Wilbur turned his head up at him and furrowed his brow, “And you’re not?”

“Of course, I am, Wilbur. But our father is human, he makes mistakes. He thought he was protecting us by not telling us about his visions. That’s a lot to put on two eleven-year-olds.”

“But...but we could’ve saved him!” Wilbur argued, his voice distressed.

Technoblade simply nodded, “You’re right, we could’ve saved him. We could’ve done a lot of things differently, but there is no point in turning against each other when we are all each other has left. Phil paid for his mistake that night. Twice over. He’s already lost his youngest son and his wife.” Techno said, squeezing his shoulder, “He can’t lose you too, Wilbur.”

Wilbur’s gaze dropped to the forest floor in shame, “I told him I hated him earlier. I didn’t mean it, but I said it all the same.” His twin raised an eyebrow at him but the brunette continued, “I need time...time to sort everything out. He won’t lose me. But I can’t face him today, not after what happened.”

Techno nodded and looked ahead at the forest in front of them, taking in the lay of the land. “Then we won’t. We’ll camp somewhere around here tonight and tomorrow you can decide what you want to do. But I’m not leaving you out here alone.”

Wilbur scoffed but Techno could see the sadness drain away from his expression as the atmosphere cleared. The brunette turned to him with a frown and said sourly, “I can handle myself just fine.”

A dry laugh exited Techno and the man side-eyed him before saying sarcastically, “*Uh huh... sure.*”

“I can, you dick!” Wilbur protested, suddenly leaning his weight forward in his saddle before clicking his tongue. And just like that, Ossium was off, leaving Techno in the dust.

The man smirked as he watched his brother’s futile attempt to escape his company. He leaned forward and gently ruffled Carl’s mane before saying gently, “Up for a bit of a race, Carl? I’ve got a few golden carrots in my satchel with your name on them.”

Carl neighed happily and Techno grinned before turning his gaze to his brother who grew smaller and smaller as he galloped away into the distant trees. He signaled Carl into a run and muttered to himself over the wind, “He never learns, does he?”

Nobody can outrun me for long.

And as the two boys raced through the forest, unbeknownst to both of them, a bird was trailing not far behind them.

The morning dawn peered through the windows of the tower and into the eyes of a certain blonde-headed boy causing him to groan and bury himself further underneath his covers. He blearily let his eyes flutter open when he felt a small weight land atop his shoulder.

He gently peeled back the covers and smiled when a bird poked her beak into his cheek.

“Ow...” Tommy mumbled half-heartedly and lifted his hand up for Crow to perch on, “How’re you this morning, Crow? Hope you had a better night than I did.”

Crow chirped sadly, quirking her head to the side. Tommy’s gaze glazed over for a moment as he recalled the events of the night before. As if on cue he felt his wings attempt to stretch uncomfortably in his spine.

Tommy sighed. He hadn’t given them enough time to heal last night, little to none if he was being honest. He had been so distraught over everything, that the boy hadn’t seen much of a point. And now he was paying for it.

Maybe if I took them out once Dream left?

No. He’d still find out somehow. It’s too risky.

Tommy looked down at Crow with sad eyes and said, “I wish you could stay longer, birdie. But Dream is home today and I have some chores to do before he leaves. I’ll see you at around nine? He should be long gone by then.”

Crow squawked affirmatively and nuzzled her head into the boy’s cheek once before flying off.

Once she cleared the hatch, Tommy threw off the rest of his blankets and walked sluggishly to his wardrobe. He traded out his nightshirt and pants for a long-sleeved blue shirt and a pair of brown

trousers. And as the early morning spring air wafted through the room, Tommy threw on a red scarf for good measure before tromping down the stairs to start his morning chores.

It didn't take him too long, he maybe finished fifteen minutes past seven. He sat the frying pan he'd used when helping Dream cook dinner last night to the side along with the other dishes, allowing them to dry on the counter. Afterward he'd settled on the living room couch with a book in hand as he waited for his brother to wake up.

As he flipped impassively through one of the books he'd read maybe a thousand times over, Dream appeared from his bedroom, already dressed in his hood.

Tommy pretended not to see him as he made his way towards the couch. Dream sat at the end of the sofa and Tommy caught him fiddling with his hands, an uncharacteristically nervous gesture on his part. The man cleared his throat before speaking, "You still mad?"

"What do you think?" Tommy growled with a tone that surprised even himself. Usually, Tommy wouldn't dare speak to Dream in such a way, but now that he had nothing more to lose...he didn't really care anymore. Consequences be damned.

To his shock, Dream only dropped his head and said softly, "I'm sorry, Tommy. But it's for your own good. I'm only doing what I think is best for you."

At that, Tommy clapped his book shut, his eyes suddenly aflame, "And what makes you think you know what is best for me?"

Dream's head snapped up and he glowered. "I saved you. I raised you myself. I've witnessed every milestone you've ever taken. *I know what's best for you.*"

Tommy stayed quiet, his seething response sitting hot on his tongue, ready to fire. His brother sighed, dropping his head, "Tommy, look at me." Reluctantly Tommy's eyes flickered to his, too fearful to deny his order. Dream's eyes were soft as he spoke, "When I get back from my trip, things will be different, I promise. You just need to trust me."

The funny thing was, Tommy wasn't sure if he could anymore. But he nodded anyway.

Dream smiled and pulled the boy to his feet. He placed a hand on his shoulder, "I'll bring you back something special for your birthday, alright?"

Tommy nodded, but his eyes were still glued to the floor. Dream tilted his chin up and said gently, "I'll be better, Tommy. I swear, just be patient. I'll see you in a couple of days, ok?"

Finally, the boy yielded and looked up at his brother. He gave him a small smile and affirmed, "Okay. I'll trust you."

The dirty blonde ruffled his hair and pulled the teen into a hug, "I love you, little brother." *Do you?*

Tommy rolled his eyes as he responded to the gimmick they'd been doing for years, "I love you more." *Do I?*

"I love you most."

Tommy didn't know if that was true anymore.

Wilbur awoke that morning to the feeling of a heavy bag being dropped on his chest along with a breakfast bar being tossed at his head not two seconds later.

The brunette groaned at the impact and sat up grouchy to see his brother smirking at him, "Wake up, Sleeping Beauty, the sun is up."

Wilbur fell dramatically backward onto the forest floor and huffed, "Bitch. I knew I should've actually tried to outrun you."

“As if you could outrun Carl,” Techno chuckled and brushed his long unbraided hair out of his face as he held up a carrot for Carl to munch on.

“True.” Wilbur mumbled as he shoved the breakfast bar into his mouth while tugging his coat on. Ossium gently nudged the back of Wilbur’s head and he smiled before reaching into Techno’s satchel to grab a carrot for him. “Here you go, boy.”

Ossium neighed back appreciatively and trotted back over to Carl’s side.

Meanwhile, Techno had moved back to sit on his own makeshift bed and attempted to pull back his hair into a poor excuse of a braid.

Wilbur scoffed and moved behind him, batting his hands away. “Let me. You always manage to get it even more knotted when you try to braid. Are you ever going to learn how to actually braid it?”

Techno grinned, “Why should I? I have you to do it for me.” Wilbur rolled his eyes and thumped the back of his head before wrangling his brother’s hair into a long french braid that showed off the shaved sides of his head.

Wilbur frowned, a memory bubbling up as he finished tying up the braid.

“Dude, you look like...” Wilbur had trailed off the day he first saw his brother’s new haircut, the insult on the tip of his tongue. Technoblade raised an eyebrow almost as a challenge, daring him to finish the sentence.

The then twenty-year-old prince knew exactly what he looked like. He looked like the warriors that had lived in their village. His hairstyle was a traditional side shave worn by any piglin brutes who had hair, which not many did.

Wilbur’s eyes darkened at the sight but he bit his tongue and let the rest of his sentence die in his throat.

Techno sighed, "We both deal with what happened to us in different ways, let's leave it at that. If I can live with your hair color then you can live with this."

Wilbur didn't respond but rather nodded instead, reaching over to squeeze his twin's shoulder. And then his eyes glinted mischievously, "You still look like a nerd."

"You still look like a prick."

Wilbur moved to the side and noticed his brother fiddling with something in his satchel. His eyes widened as he took in the sight of the contraption.

"You brought our elytras?" He asked and Techno nodded as he threaded a thick piece of wire through one of the loops, synching one piece to another.

"I figured it couldn't hurt to get some practice... Besides, I promised Tubbo I'd take it out for another test run at some point. Yours is in the bag."

Wilbur grinned and eagerly snatched his bag up from his makeshift bed, giddy as he ran his fingers delicately over the blue leather. Tubbo's invention was truly something to admire. The two princes were the first to have gotten to try it out a few weeks back, though they had nearly spiraled into the ground, as they hadn't been sure how to balance themselves.

But after a few tries, they were getting decent. The elytra itself wasn't exactly a wing per se and they couldn't fly with it.

But they could glide.

It was a temporary solution until Tubbo figured out how to get the elytra to flap in synchronization with Wilbur's other wing. He had a few ideas, but they were still in early development.

But for now, they essentially could fly by gliding off of cliffs and towers, nearly giving their father a heart attack on multiple occasions.

“Awesome. But we should send Ossium and Carl home if we’re going to use these, otherwise, they won’t be able to keep up,” Wilbur pointed out, and Techno frowned before nodding.

“Yeah, you’re right. Besides we don’t exactly have enough to feed them as of now, so we should go on foot from here on out.” Techno stood and gently brushed Carl’s snout.

“You hear that boy, make sure to get Ossium back to Quackity, alright? Thank you for getting us out this far,” Techno said in an uncharacteristically gentle voice that he only ever used for Carl.

Wilbur patted Ossium on the nose affectionately to say goodbye and then smiled as he watched the two horses take off, already heading back into the direction of the castle. He knew nobody would dare be foolish enough to try to take Carl, which meant Ossium would be safe in his company.

Once the horses had cleared out, the twins began to take down the camp they had set up the night before. Wilbur stamped out any leftover embers from their campfire, not wanting to risk a fire breaking out due to their carelessness.

As soon as they’d destroyed any evidence of a camp, they packed up their gear and were just about to start moving when Wilbur felt something poke at him when he placed his canteen back into his satchel. His fingers wrapped around a metal chain and his expression faltered as he pulled out Theseus’s necklace.

Techno turned to see what the hold-up was and frowned, “You sure it was a good idea to bring that?”

Wilbur held it up, letting the emerald dangle in front of his face. He smiled sadly, “I never go anywhere without it. Felt wrong to leave it behind.”

Just as he was about to place the necklace back into his satchel, like a divine intervention from the sky, a bird swooped down as fast as an arrow and snatched Theseus’s necklace from his hand.

“Shit!” Techno yelled and immediately took off after what looked like a raven. He briefly turned back to yell at Wilbur, who was still in shock. “Dude! Move your ass, before it gets away!”

The brunette shook himself out from the shock and sprinted off as well.

The two boys ran through the forest as if their lives depended on it, desperately hoping the bird would drop the last remnant they had of their little brother.

“Should I shoot it down?!” Wilbur yelled, already loading an arrow into his crossbow. Techno shook his head, “You can’t! That’s a crow!”

“Who the hell cares if it’s a crow?! It’s getting away!” Wilbur argued, aiming his bow to the sky, trying to line up his sight.

But before he could let the arrow fly, Techno just about smacked the crossbow out of his hand, mid-sprint.

“What the hell, man?!” Wilbur shouted angrily as he fumbled to not drop his crossbow or set it off.

“Do not shoot that bird, Wilbur. Those were Mom’s birds and I won’t let you kill it. We can catch it!” Techno pleaded and sped up almost impossibly faster as he effortlessly jumped over overgrown tree roots and fallen branches.

Wilbur huffed and ripped the arrow out of its holster and shoved it back into his quiver. “Fine, what’s your oh-so-brilliant plan!?”

Techno looked around at his surroundings, trying to see if he could gather where he was. If he remembered correctly, they were running in the exact direction of a cliff that led down to a part of the forest that was almost impossible to access. That was unless you traveled through the old mine shafts that had been built and then abandoned decades ago.

And it appeared that was exactly where the crow was headed.

“Wilbur!” Techno turned to his brother, nearly running into a tree as he took his eyes off the forest ahead of him for a split second. He could see already that his brother was getting tired, clearly not used to running this long. Techno fumbled to grab his elytra from his pack, careful not to let anything else fall as he attached it to his back.

Wilbur took notice and his face went pale. “Are you fucking insane?”

“Probably, now put on your elytra, Wilbur. We’re maybe two hundred yards from a cliff and I’m not stopping.”

And just like that, Wilbur snatched his own elytra from his bag and clumsily put it on. The twins eventually had to slow down for a moment to secure the wings, but funnily enough, the bird slowed down as well.

“This is not how I planned to die, Techno!” Wilbur shouted angrily when they took off again after securing their items.

Techno grinned, “Don’t think about it! Just glide and try not to land on your head.”

“Thanks, that really makes me feel better!” The brunette hissed as his gaze darted up to the bird, who sped up and nose-dived down what to Wilbur’s eyes appeared to be a death trap. He watched as Techno brought up his wing to mirror the elytra, but not enough that the wind would catch him before he could jump.

Wilbur did the same but not before yelling to his brother, “If we die, I’ll kill you!” Techno laughed, “Get ready! Make sure to follow me down.”

“Bastard...” Wilbur muttered and then sucked in a breath as the two jumped.

And then he was weightless. Wilbur spread out his wing and felt his elytra open and suddenly all the fear he had vanished as he soared through the air. He pried his eyes open and let out a laugh as he was met with blue sky and the wind rushing through his hair.

Phil was right. This is what it felt like to be truly free.

Wilbur turned his gaze downward and saw his brother maybe thirty feet below him and if he squinted, he could see the bird flying down towards the ground. So in order to keep up, Wilbur made a sharp descent down till he could get on the same level as Techno.

Once he was in range and the ground was maybe a hundred and fifty feet below them, Techno called to his brother over the wind, “Wilbur do you see that?”

Techno pointed towards the east to a large, mountain-like cliff that seemed to border a good chunk of the forest.

“Yeah, what about it?” Wilbur called back, swooping to the side.

“There is a river traveling on top of that mountain but I can’t see where it ends. This means there is an opening, maybe a cavern of some kind in that mountain that either leads to a lake or a huge waterfall. And if my suspicions are correct, the crow is making a direct bee-line for it.” Techno inferred. Wilbur was amazed that his twin was so well-versed in geography.

“We’re running out of sky Techno, we need to land!” Wilbur warned and Techno agreed and began making his descent but never taking his eye off the bird who was already slowing down herself.

As the two landed on the forest floor with Wilbur nearly hitting a tree, the bird circled back towards them before perching on a branch in a tall tree with the necklace still firmly clamped in her beak.

“It’s like she’s waiting for us or something.” Techno mused as he removed his elytra and tucked his wing into his back. Wilbur laughed at that as he shoved his elytra back into his satchel.

“It’s just a bird, Techno. I’m sure it’s just curious about us.”

Techno didn’t respond and as soon as the two had put away their gear the bird took off again. But this time she flew up high and over the large cliff, disappearing into the cavern.

Wilbur huffed, “Well that's just great, now what?”

“We follow it. If we can't find an entrance then we'll just climb up and over.” Techno looked up at the mountain as best he could through the trees, “She went down, which means her nest is probably somewhere in there.”

Wilbur frowned, guilt churning in his gut, “I'm sorry...I should've never brought it with me. It was stupid.”

“Don't worry, we'll find his necklace, Wil,” Techno assured him and gently placed a hand on his shoulder.

“I hope so.” Wilbur breathed, “I don't know what I'll do if we lose it.”

Dream had left the tower nearly an hour ago and Tommy had already fallen back to his normal routine of moping around the tower, bored out of his mind. He made himself breakfast to try and cheer himself up, but found himself stabbing his fork into his pancakes repeatedly until they were a mushy pile of maple syrup and batter.

He shoved his breakfast to the side and laid his head down on the table. Tears welled up in his eyes but he refused to let them fall down his face. Instead, he wiped them away and stood to his feet, not bothering to put his plate in the sink.

Pointless.

He trudged up into his room and sat down at his piano bench. Tommy lifted up the lid and let his fingers drift aimlessly across the keys. There was no melody, no specific song he was attempting to play. It was a mash of random notes that somehow still sounded decent to his ears.

You are not leaving this tower, ever.

This was it. This was all he was ever going to be. Just some kid locked in a tower left to rot. There was no longer any passion in his song, the notes fell flat and Tommy's finger kept hitting one specific key repeatedly. The same note echoed throughout Tommy's mind as his hand remained stuck on the key, unable to move forward with the song.

How ironic.

He would've been content to stay in that spot for a few more hours if he hadn't heard Crow tap her beak against the hatch.

Tommy looked up and tried to smile as he pulled the lever, letting Crow soar down to land on his shoulder. He greeted the bird, running his hand over her feathers. Tommy's eyes flitted downward and he couldn't help but notice something glinting within her beak.

He opened up his palm and raised an eyebrow when Crow dropped a golden necklace with an emerald pendant into his palm.

"Oh, what's this?" Tommy asked, lifting up the necklace to his face to look more closely at it. Something that had been dead and buried stirred in his chest at the sight of it but he couldn't figure out why. It just felt *right* holding the necklace. He ran his thumb across the smooth face of the stone and then walked over to his mirror.

The face that stared back at him was a tired one and Tommy's eyes were still puffy despite not allowing his sadness to spill over. He tried to ignore that as he pulled the chain over his head and let the pendant rest on his chest. As he looked at the boy in the mirror, the person staring back suddenly seemed like a stranger to him. Like he belonged in a different world... a different life.

He didn't know how to feel about such a revelation. It was just a necklace, perhaps one that Crow had found somewhere lost and forgotten in some alley.

Though there wasn't really any sign of age or wear on the necklace. No, it looked like it had been properly cared for.

“Where...Where did you find this, Crow?” Tommy asked, his voice soft. He held the emerald with his forefinger and thumb and twisted it back and forth, a familiar gesture for reasons Tommy could not yet begin to understand.

Crow chirped innocently and before he could ask her anything more, she flew off, leaving Tommy with only his reflection as company.

After a few more minutes of staring, Tommy sighed and took off the necklace. He tucked it delicately into his little hiding spot inside his piano bench and went downstairs to finish the dishes.

Wilbur’s hand brushed across the stone face of the cliff with a faraway look in his eye. He traced his finger over every bump and edge as they walked alongside the bottom of the cliffside, searching tirelessly for an entrance.

He looked up into the nearby trees and nearly laughed at the sight of his twin leaping gracefully from limb to limb, carefully distributing his weight so as to not cause a branch to snap. The reason he was up there was to get a higher vantage point but also to look around at the various bird nests in the trees just in case they had been wrong about where the bird went.

“See anything down there?” Techno called, hopping into another tree. Wilbur shook his head, “Nothing but solid stone.”

“Well keep it up there has to be a way in,” Techno replied and Wilbur sighed but didn’t argue.

He was about to ask how his search was going when all of a sudden there was a loud caw from somewhere not far from here that sent Technoblade scrambling down from his perch and Wilbur flying in the direction of the sound.

The caw repeated again every so often as the twins raced through the forest much like they had earlier. *It’s like this bird is trying to get us to find her.* It didn’t make sense, but maybe Wilbur was simply reading too much into it. Finally, they came across an ivy-covered section of stone that had Techno grabbing his twin by the arm and pulling him to a stop.

Wilbur watched as his brother's trained eyes scanned over it, looking for anything out of place. Wilbur squinted at the hanging veil of ivy and something about it put him off as well. That feeling only doubled when he heard the crow call out again, but this time the noise stemmed from the rock.

Wilbur walked to the veil and brushed his fingers over the leaves. And then he pushed his hand forward, expecting it to brush against stone.

But it didn't and Wilbur nearly fell as stumbled into the veil of ivy and into a cave, or what he thought was a cave. He heard his brother gasp and Wilbur looked up to see what was wrong.

He had to admit, out of all the possibilities that ran through his mind about what lay inside the cavern, a lone, tall, stone tower sitting secluded from the rest of the world wasn't exactly what he pictured.

"What the..." Wilbur mumbled and Techno simply nodded, looking equally as confused. His twin helped him to his feet and the two looked at each other, unsure of what to do next. "Do you suppose it's abandoned?" Techno asked as they walked towards the base of the tower, his eyes trained on the overgrown ivy wrapping around the tower. Then he looked at the huge waterfall behind that tower and smiled. He had been right on that account.

Wilbur shrugged, "I mean, I think it'd have to be. Who on Earth would want to live all the way out here? I mean there is nothing in this area for miles."

"Which makes it a perfect nesting place for a bird," Techno suggested and then grabbed two arrows from Wilbur's quiver.

"What? You're just gonna free climb it?" Wilbur asked incredulously.

Techno responded to his question by plunging an arrow into a crevice between stones and began scaling the tower, "Hurry up, loser, before I beat you to the top."

"Dude, I am not racing you while free-climbing an eighty-foot tower." Wilbur countered, rolling his eyes at Techno who was already a good twenty feet in the air.

“ *Chicken .*” Techno called and Wilbur growled and pulled out two arrows of his own, “ *Competitive bastard .*”

He had no chance of beating his brother to the top and grumbled as he saw Techno climb into the tower. He waited expectantly for his twin to gloat at him from the window while he scaled the rest of it, but he didn't.

“Techno?” Wilbur called, nearly at the window.

There was no response.

“Dude, stop fucking with me. If you scare me I swear to prime I'll shave you bald in your sleep.” Still nothing.

Something wasn't right.

Wilbur carefully pulled himself onto the ledge but before he crawled inside he waited, listening carefully for any sign of movement.

It was subtle, the short panicked breath of someone just out of sight. It was much too high in pitch to be Techno's. Wilbur took a deep breath and leapt inside, landing on his feet. Immediately he turned and caught the wrist of whoever had been hiding from him. The person yelped in pain and the weapon in their hand clattered to the floor.

Really? A frying pan?

Another hand shot out to swipe at him, and Wilbur hissed as the stranger smacked him across the face causing him to release his hold on the stranger's wrist.

The stranger was much smaller than he expected and much too skinny. A child maybe? He couldn't quite see him though due to every other window in the house being covered, giving the stranger the

advantage of knowing the tower's layout. He moved forward blindly in the dark and then stumbled to the ground as he tripped over what he guessed was his brother.

He looked down and could vaguely make out Techno's unconscious body in the darkness. Wilbur waited for a moment until he was one hundred percent sure his brother was breathing.

Wilbur looked for the frying pan that had most likely been the culprit that knocked out Techno and froze when he saw it was no longer on the floor.

It was now in the hands of some stranger who was hiding somewhere in the tower ready to pounce.

He decided it was better to surrender before he too got whacked with the pan, "Alright! Alright! Whoever you are! I surrender! There is no need for anyone else to get hurt, okay?"

He heard the quick steps of bare feet against the stone floor and then a voice much too childlike to be that of an adult echoed throughout the room. "Drop your weapons! Keep your hands where I can see them!"

"Well, I can't exactly do both at the same time, kid."

"Don't play dumb, or you'll end up like Pinky over there."

Wilbur growled at that but unhooked his crossbow from his back and slid it across the room. He grabbed Techno's sword and his own dagger from its sheath and slid that over as well. With that Wilbur raised his hands up as he crouched next to his brother's unconscious form,

"There. No more weapons, now will you please stop hiding in the dark? I'm not going to hurt you."

Suddenly a roll of duct tape was tossed at his head, "Ow..." Wilbur grumbled. "Tie Pinky's hands and then your own."

Wilbur sighed. But he did what the kid said, after all, he was pretty sure whoever was in the shadows wouldn't kill him...hopefully.

It became apparent quickly once Wilbur had bound Techno's hands that it was really hard to tie his own. He looked into the darkness and lifted his hands, "Uh...a little help?"

The voice stammered and Wilbur's eyes softened at the fear in the kid's tone when they said, "J-just do the best you can and don't try anything."

The best he could do was wrap the tape around once or twice before letting the roll hang, unable to cut it.

"Now will you come out?" Wilbur huffed. He heard a couple of footsteps and then the clicking sound of a latch as one of the windows opened. The brunette saw a flash of blonde before the kid darted back into the shadows.

"Trying to make a dramatic entrance?"

"Oh, *shut up*," The kid growled. Wilbur saw the tip of the pan and one of the child's feet peek out as he nervously edged his way into the light.

The kid took a deep breath.

A child no older than fourteen or fifteen appeared from the darkness. He was tall and scrawny and Wilbur could already tell that he had terrible posture. The boy had long blonde hair that fell to his shoulders and bright blue eyes.

The boy raised his frying pan menacingly into the air as he stepped closer to Wilbur and growled,

"Who are you? And how did you find me?"



Chapter End Notes

I legitimately wanted to tag this chapter with Frying-Pan Violence but I didn't want to spoil the ending.

But they boys are back together<3

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

My Little Versailles

Chapter Notes

yall ready for neopolitian trio???

TW: Implied Child Abuse, Panic Attacks

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3

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“I said...Who are you? And how did you find me ?” The boy said while coiling himself to strike. His blue eyes were cold as ice as the blonde glared at him, but Wilbur could still see the fear in his eyes.

But for the sake of his face, Wilbur answered, “Easy, kid. Easy. My name is Wilbur and this is my brother, Technoblade. We saw a bird fly in here with a necklace that belongs to us. We didn’t know the place was inhabited.”

The boy’s expression flickered but Wilbur could spot the recognition at the mention of the necklace. *He knows about it.*

“ Who else knows about me, *Wilbur?*”

Wilbur sighed, “Listen, blondie.”

“Tommy. ”

“Okay, *Tommy*. We didn’t mean to scare you. We truly thought nobody lived here.”

Tommy looked confused, and lowered his frying pan an inch or two. It still didn’t stop the look of skepticism from creeping onto his face.

“You... You aren’t here for me?” Tommy asked, his voice suddenly soft.

“No, we’re just trying to find the necklace. Why would we be here for you?”

At that moment, he heard his brother stir beneath him and Tommy scampered back several feet till he was perched on the table, fear rampant in his eyes.

“Easy, he won’t hurt you.” Wilbur assured and attempted to gesture through his bindings. “Says you,” Techno groaned as he pushed himself to his elbows.

“He’s just a kid, Tech.” Wilbur mumbled, elbowing his brother in the side as he sat up. “Kid or not, little shit gave me one hell of a headache.”

“You broke into my home?” Tommy countered, tilting his head.

Techno sat up, leaning heavily against Wilbur and nodded, “Fair enough.”

Technoblade turned to Wilbur, raising his bound wrists up and asked, “Wilbur...why am I tied up?”

Wilbur snorted, “Peace of mind for the kid.”

“Tommy.” The blonde snarled, “I’m not a ‘kid’.”

His twin laughed, “You sure don’t hit like one that’s for sure. How old are you?” Tommy furrowed his brow, looking contemplative, “Old enough.”

Wilbur raised an eyebrow at that, “Okay then...How about the necklace, have you seen it? It’s an emerald pendant with a gold chain.”

At that very moment, a bird flew through the window, narrowly missing Wilbur as she landed on Tommy's shoulder.

"It's the bird," Wilbur growled, but Techno placed a hand on his chest, apparently having already escaped his bonds, ushering him back.

Tommy's eyes widened and let out a small choked sound as he scampered back to his kitchen countertop.

"Dude, I said, 'peace of mind'? Did you not hear that bit?" Wilbur chastised but Techno simply rolled his eyes. "You tied 'em too tight. My hands were close to turning blue, idiot."

Wilbur sighed and broke his own bonds but he took a few steps back from Tommy, not wanting to frighten him anymore.

The crow on Tommy's shoulder tilted its head at the two boys and then casually flew onto Techno's shoulder, much to both his and Tommy's surprise.

"C-Crow?" Tommy exclaimed and Wilbur looked at him with bewilderment. "You named your pet crow, Crow?"

Tommy snarled, "You try living in this tower and see how creative you can be, fuck off."

Then the blonde turned to his bird, "No, Crow. I can't trust them. I don't know them and neither do you."

"That bird is the one who stole our necklace." Techno accused looking at the bird on his shoulder who seemed almost smug as she squawked back. Tommy's face was unreadable but Wilbur noticed the way his hands seemed to fidget at the mention of it.

“You know where it is,” Wilbur accused, his tone a bit too harsh. Tommy paled at that and Wilbur took note of the way his demeanor shifted almost instantly as the boy stammered, “Y-Yes, I’m uh... I’ll...”

He was afraid again. He had gone from abrasive to terrified in all of two seconds. *Odd*. “Why don’t you go get it and your bird can keep us in check. I’m almost positive she could easily peck our eyes out if we tried anything,” Technoblade suggested, trying to ease the tension.

Tommy nodded and slid from the counter. He never took his eyes off the two as he shuffled up the stairs with his frying pan in hand. The second the boy was out of earshot, Techno turned to Wilbur.

“He can’t be older than fifteen. What’s he doing all alone out here?”

“More importantly, *who else* is living here? Someone has to be feeding him.”

Techno raised a brow, “Not very well from the looks of it. But other than that he looks well cared for and we’re not responsible for every hungry family.”

“Not yet,” Wilbur pointed out. Techno nodded at that and then threatened, “By the way, you tell anyone I got knocked out by a thirteen-year-old and I will stab you with your own knife.”

“Rude.”

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Holy fucking shit.

Keep it together, Tommy. Don't panic. It's okay. I'm okay.

Tommy inhaled deeply through his nose and out his mouth trying to bring down his racing heartbeat. The necklace was coiled almost painfully tight in his fist.

Dream had told him once when he was younger that if strangers ever entered the tower he was either supposed to hide or fight. He was supposed to do everything in his power to keep from being taken.

So why didn't he knock the other one out or just hide?

What am I doing?

"Tommy? You okay up there?" Wilbur called, and the blonde tensed.

"F-Fine! I'm fine! Just...I just need a second..."

Tommy looked down at the necklace and traced the face of the green gem with his finger. *I'm sorry, Dream. I have to see for myself if what you said was true.*

This is my chance.

With that Tommy bounded back down the stairs with the necklace in hand. The two brothers (twins maybe?) stood from the ground and the teen jumped a bit at that, still pretty nervous. He took a cautious step towards them and swallowed, trying to gather his courage.

"Before I give this back, I have something to ask. And since you broke into my home and scared the shit out of me I feel it's fair for you to hear me out." Tommy began and at that Crow flew back onto his shoulder.

Wilbur seemed wary but he nodded while Techno didn't respond at all. The blonde carefully inched past the two boys, careful not to get within reach and walked to the window.

With his free hand he pointed to the castle, “Do you see that?”

Wilbur turned to peer out the window and furrowed his brow “The castle?” Tommy nodded, “Do you know about the lights that appear every year?”

Techno stepped forward, his expression searching, “You mean the Lantern Ceremony they do for the youngest prince?”

“Lanterns...” Tommy mouthed. *They weren't stars. They were lanterns.*

“Yes.” Tommy swallowed, “I n-need you both to act as my guide, take me there for this *ceremony*, and then bring me back home safely.”

“And why would we do that?” Techno asked, letting out a dry laugh.

Tommy smiled deviously and dangled the necklace in the air. Crow immediately snatched it out of his hand and flew up to the rafters.

“Because otherwise, *she* will not give it back.” Tommy grinned, “Crow doesn't like to lose her toys and right now she seems pretty attached to that necklace.”

Wilbur's eyes darkened and for a moment Tommy was terrified he had just made a mistake. The brunette growled, “And how do we know she won't just hide it somewhere where even you won't be able to find it?”

“Crow is a lot smarter than you think. I've had her with me since I was little and she has never once lost something of mine. And also...Crow will follow us so you both will still be able to see that she still has the necklace.” Tommy explained while wringing his hands together.

“You do realize that if you lose that necklace, I can have you thrown in jail for theft?” Wilbur hissed but Tommy held his ground and leaned forward.

“Then I suppose we both have something to lose. Now...” Tommy stretched out his hand. “*Do we have a deal?*”

Wilbur glared at him coldly and then turned to his twin. The man furrowed his brow and then shrugged. Tommy tilted his head, confused. It was almost as if they were having a conversation without using their words. It made very little sense to him.

Finally Techno reached out and shook his hand, “You’ve got yourself a deal, kid.”

The emperor was a mess. He hadn’t slept a wink since the twins had failed to come home despite Schlatt’s attempts to reassure him that they would find them.

“The princes are smart, Phil. They know how to take care of themselves.” Schlatt said reassuringly, “And if they’re together, then you know Techno will never let anything bad happen to Wilbur.”

“I know, I know.” Phil said fretfully as he leaned on his hands against his desk, looking down, “But I can’t stop thinking about ‘*what if?*’ What if they get hurt, or lost, or maybe they just hate me now and don’t want to come home.”

“Phil...” Schlatt sighed and placed a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “You know they could never do that to you. Not after everything. They’ll come home. Either on their own or whenever Puffy or Sam’s parties find them.”

Phil nodded and collapsed into his chair, putting his head into his hands.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Schlatt watched as Phil’s head shot up and he rasped, “Come in.”

The door opened and a mop of brown curls and horns poked his head in. Tubbo meekly said, “Uh...sorry to intrude, your Majesty.”

Phil gave the boy a weak smile, “It’s alright, Tubbo. What is it?”

“Can I borrow my dad for a bit? It’s important.”

“What’s wrong, Tubbo?” Schlatt said, crossing his arms, “You didn’t explode anything did you?” Tubbo let out a suspiciously nervous laugh, “Not yet, but it’s private.”

Schlatt sighed and turned to Phil. “Try to get some sleep and I’ll see if I can get any updates for Sam or Puff.”

Phil simply nodded, the warmth on his expression already gone and replaced with worry. Schlatt walked out of the study and Tubbo quickly darted to his side, nearly bumping into him.

“So, what’s so important that you needed me to abandon his Majesty for?” He teased but then paused when he saw Tubbo fidgeting with his nails, a nervous habit.

He gently grabbed his son’s shoulder and stopped him. “Tubbo?” Schlatt asked, feeling dread creep in his gut when the boy continued to stare at the ground.

“Quackity and I didn’t want to worry Phil anymore than he already is...so he wanted you to see for yourself...”

“Look at me, son,” He ordered gently. Tubbo reluctantly looked up and Schlatt continued, “See what?”

Tubbo took a deep breath. “The horses they were riding, Ossium and Carl...Charlie just found them outside the gate.”

“And the princes?”

Tubbo shook his head, his chin wobbling. Schlatt wrapped an arm around his son and Tubbo leaned in. “It’s not like them to just disappear like this...”

“You’re right. It’s not,” Schlatt murmured resting his chin atop his son’s hair as he hugged him. “They’ll be alright though. We’ll find them.”

“I should’ve known...” Tubbo began, but Schlatt quickly cut him off.

“I’ll have none of that, Tubbo. There is no point in dwelling on things you could’ve done. It’s a waste of time that you could be spending either fixing your error, learning how to be better next time, or moving on with your life.”

Tubbo let his head drop as he pulled away from his father’s arms. “You’re right.”

Schlatt’s hand never left his son’s shoulder as he said, “Nobody expects you to be perfect, Tubbo.”

The young ram looked up with a knowing expression. “You do.”

Schlatt smiled and ruffled the boy’s hair. “To me, you’ve been perfect since the first time I held you in my arms. There is nothing you could ever do that would change that.”

“You’re getting soft in your old age, Dad.” Tubbo grinned.

Schlatt narrowed his eyes deviously, “*Oh yeah?*”

Suddenly Tubbo was being helplessly thrown over his dad’s shoulder causing him to shriek, “Put me down, old man!”

“Call me old again and I’ll dangle you over a balcony, you little shit,” Schlatt cackled as he walked through the hall to get to the kitchen much to Tubbo’s embarrassment as he was unable to free himself.

Tommy watched nervously from the window as Technoblade scaled down the window from the ladder. It was the first time the realization of just how high up he lived sunk in and he couldn't help but feel nauseated by the thought of climbing down eighty feet. He didn't understand how Dream did this every time he came home.

A hand was placed cautiously on his shoulder and he heard Wilbur from behind him.

"Just don't think about it." With that Wilbur also began descending down the ladder leaving Tommy with his thoughts.

The pack on his back shifted uncomfortably. It was filled with minimal supplies, his pan, and a pair of Dream's old boots that the twins had insisted he needed to bring.

He supposed it made sense that the ground below him would feel different than the smooth stone bricks he'd walked upon all his life.

He felt Crow upon his shoulder nudge him with her head. The necklace wasn't in her beak. After much debate between the three boys, Wilbur had asked that Crow leave the necklace here where it would at least be safe till they could come retrieve it. Tommy agreed since it was a much better plan than having her carry it everywhere.

Right now, the necklace was sitting inside his piano bench, safe and sound.

"You coming, blondie?" Wilbur called, already halfway down the tower.

Tommy stood at the ledge, holding on tightly to the side of the window. He took a deep breath and tried to suppress the fear swirling around in his chest.

Almost there. You're almost there. It's within reach.

Everything I ever wanted awaits down below.

Tommy turned to look at the tower he'd spent the majority of his life in. His entire life sat on display within these walls.

Should I? It's not too late to change my mind...

No. Don't be a pussy.

Tommy had an iron grip on the ledge as he hung over it until his feet felt the rungs of the ladder. With one hand he hung precariously over certain death until he firmly grasped the ladder.

He began the slow descent down and with each rung he felt his heart flutter in his chest like a bird about to take flight. He could feel the breeze of early spring on his face as it rustled his hair. Even the feeling of the carved wood beneath his feet felt new and exciting.

And then he realized he was a rung or two from the ground. His breath caught in his throat and his body went rigid as he took in the grass just inches beneath him. It wasn't smooth or as symmetrical as it had seemed from the tower. Each blade was a different size, shaped, and length that when amassed in millions made up the soft cushion like terrain that covered the Earth.

"Tommy?" He heard Techno call, but Tommy chose to ignore him as he slowly lowered himself onto the ground beneath him.

To his surprise it wasn't cold as the stones in the tower had been. The grass below him was warm and alive and it tickled as he let go of the last tether of his tower and sank to his knees.

"It's so soft..." Tommy noted quietly to himself.

He ran his fingers gently through the greenery and pulled a dandelion puff from the ground just as another breeze wafted through the air, sending the seeds flying through the air.

Tommy shot to his feet, trying to follow where they went and nearly slipped when his feet hit cold water. One of the twins caught him by his arm, keeping him upright. The blonde turned to see Techno trying to look at anything but him. Looking forward he saw that he had stepped into the lake that had been created by the waterfall behind his tower.

“Holy shit, it’s fucking cold!” Tommy exclaimed, “*Why the fuck is it cold!?*”

“It’s April?” Techno answered.

Tommy’s eyes widened in wonder and he mouthed, “*That’s so poggers...*”

Tommy’s feet slid on the rocks as he took another step and he fought to keep his balance for a moment. Thankfully Techno had a tight grip on his arm.

“The rocks are slippery...why is that?” Tommy asked, shuffling his feet over the slick stone in the lake, while Techno tried to keep him upright.

“Uh...it’s because it’s covered in moss from being in the water so long. It’s the green stuff you’re standing on.”

Tommy moved his foot and stared at the beautiful green plant and whispered with an entranced expression, “I want to eat it.”

“No Tommy, you can’t eat moss.” Techno rolled his eyes exasperated.

Tommy frowned and stepped out of the lake, pulling away from Techno’s grasp. The sun shone on him for the first time in years and he inhaled the air around him like it was his first breath.

He wanted to explore anything and everything around him. He wanted to experience all that he had been robbed of by his brother. He wanted to run far far away from the tower and keep running till it was out of sight.

Tommy turned to Wilbur and giggled, “Come on!”

Wilbur gave him a bemused expression, clearly caught off guard by Tommy’s enthusiasm. He looked toward the ivy wall he’d seen Dream pass through millions of times and began sprinting through the grass as fast as he could, no longer bound by the confines of his tower.

He could run as far as he wanted now.

He saw Crow soar over head and into the ivy, out of view. Tommy took a deep breath as he passed through the leaves. He stumbled to a halt when the scenery changed before his very eyes into a lush forest with trees that towered over him.

“Woah...” Tommy gaped. Everything was so *green*, more so than he’d ever expected. The world around him was alive and for the first time in forever, he felt alive with it.

“Kid!” A voice behind him called, and Tommy turned to see that the twins had caught up with him. It was Techno who scolded, “You can’t just run off like that, okay? There are probably bears in these woods.”

“Sorry,” Tommy winced, “I’ve just...this is just all so new to me.”

“How...How long have you been in that tower?” Wilbur asked, trying to mask his concern. Tommy shook his head. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

Tommy looked back at the ivy and felt a horrible gnawing guilt in his chest come out of nowhere.

The blonde sighed, “My brother is going to kill me when he finds out I left.” “Your brother?” Techno inquired curiously, trying not to pry too much for fear he’d shut down.

“He’s um...well...he’s a tad overprotective and...strict.” Tommy wrapped his arms around himself, “And I definitely just broke his trust.”

Wilbur tilted his head, “I would say it’s not too late to turn back, but I’m already starting to question your brother’s parenting methods.” At that Wilbur looked down, eyeing the bruise on Tommy’s wrist that was peeking from his sleeve.

Tommy’s cheeks went red and he pulled down his sleeve. “*It’s none of your concern,*” he growled.

Wilbur shrugged, “You’re right, it’s not. Now do you want to do this or not?”

And then Wilbur cried out, “Ow!” Tommy giggled when he noticed Crow tugging sharply at Wilbur’s hair. The bird let go and flew back to Tommy’s shoulder as Wilbur glared at her.

“I don’t think she liked your tone, Wil.” Techno laughed while Wilbur held the back of his head gently.

Techno looked at Tommy for a long moment, his expression unreadable until finally he sighed, “It’s going to be a long trip so we should probably eat beforehand. I don’t wanna have to hear Wilbur bitch the whole time.”

Wilbur smacked his arm and Techno chuckled as he turned to his twin, “I saw a meadow not too far off earlier that looked pretty safe.”

The brunette nodded before trudging off in its direction. “As long as it’s not here. I don’t care where we eat, just so long as we do.”

Tommy leaned over to Techno as they began walking and asked, “Is he always like this?”

“Prickly? Yeah. But he’ll warm up eventually. Just give him time.”

“And you?”

It was so quiet Techno almost didn't catch it. But when it registered he frowned, "I'll get there. You might be surprised to find that most people don't like to have their stuff held hostage."

"Yeah? Most people don't like to have their homes broken into," Tommy shot back. Techno rolled his eyes. "I said I was sorry."

"No you didn't." The blonde countered, hopping over a large tree root.

Techno paused, thinking back and raised his eyebrows. "I suppose I didn't, well in that case, I'm sorry for breaking into your home. So is Wilbur."

"I never agreed to that!" Wilbur called from a way's ahead of them and Tommy laughed.

"Well...I'm sorry for decking you with my frying pan." Tommy said, causing Techno to snort, "Yeah? Well, thanks for missing my face. I appreciate that."

Tommy nodded and the three boys finished the rest of their trek to the meadow. Just before the three could reach the tree line, Wilbur hung back to let them catch up.

The brunette turned to Tommy and asked, "Have you ever seen a wildflower field before?"

Tommy shook his head and Wilbur suppressed a smile as he stepped out of view, allowing the teen to gasp in awe at the sight before him.

It was a section of the forest where there weren't nearly as many trees and the ground looked like a rainbow of colors from every different flower imaginable.

"Oh... *wow*," Tommy murmured.

He was about to take a step forward when Wilbur said offhandedly, "Might wanna put your shoes on. Don't wanna step on something you can't see barefoot."

The boy grumbled but didn't argue as he shucked on a pair of socks and Dream's old boots. The leather felt foreign as he took a step or two, not liking the way his feet felt trapped, but he would just have to deal with it.

While Techno and Wilbur set up a spot for them to eat, Tommy was practically rolling through the flowers unable to contain his laughter. Everything was just so new and exciting that he couldn't contain his joy.

I never want to go back .

The thought tore through Tommy like lightning as Dream's voice echoed through his ears, *"I'm just trying to keep you safe. They can find kids like you."*

Tommy felt his wings stretch in his back and he frowned. He couldn't risk it. He would keep his wings in till he got home, no doubt about it. He couldn't trust Wilbur and Techno.

"Tommy! Come on, kid! Wilbur's getting impatient," Techno called and Tommy smiled only for his expression to drop as he realized something. He couldn't afford to let his guard down, these people...they're strangers. No matter how— well nice is a stretch—*not shitty* they may seem...he couldn't trust them.

He couldn't afford to. Dream was right whether he wished to admit it or not. Strangers are dangerous. He needed to be smart about this and keep himself from getting too close.

Tommy wiped the solemn expression off his face and scrambled from his spot in the flowers, running over to the blanket the two had set out. Tommy sat near Wilbur and pulled out some jam, bread, and some cheese he'd brought. He lathered the jam over one slice of bread and took a bite.

"You sure you don't want something more filling? We have extras." Wilbur asked, not looking away from his food. Tommy looked down and wrinkled his nose at the roast beef sandwich Wilbur offered.

"No thanks, I don't eat meat," Tommy said casually.

Wilbur nodded. “Oh, well in that case—” Wilbur dug inside his pack for a moment and pulled another sandwich, this one filled with hummus and an assortment of vegetables.

Tommy grinned and took the sandwich eagerly. He took a big bite before mumbling, “Thanks.”

Wilbur waved him off, still refusing to meet his gaze. “Don’t worry about it. Our Dad is a vegetarian so we’re used to eating stuff without meat.”

“Where’d you even get that? You’re shit at cooking.” Techno mused and took another bite from his baked potato.

The tips of Wilbur’s ears went red and he muttered, “...Quackity.”

“*Simp.*” Techno grinned, causing Wilbur to chuck a piece of roast at him. Tommy raised an eyebrow but didn’t question it. It wasn’t his place to pry.

Tommy reached to take another bite of his sandwich and frowned when he realized he’d eaten it already.

“Quite an appetite you have.” Techno pointed out.

Tommy dropped his head before muttering, “Sorry.”

The hybrid frowned and tilted his head, “Why are you apologizing? There is nothing wrong with that.” The man tossed him an apple and Tommy sheepishly thanked him, taking a bite. Tommy looked down at the blanket he was sitting on and pondered to himself.

This wasn’t what I expected. They’re so nice...for the most part. I’m a complete stranger to them.

This wasn’t what Dream had told him other people were like.

While he waited on the twins to finish their meals, Tommy found himself fiddling with a handful of flowers and a pocket knife Techno had let him borrow.

Within a few minutes he had woven together an assortment of dandelions, daisies, primroses, etc. into a crown of flowers for himself. He casually set it upon his head and then finished eating his apple.

Techno stared at the crown for a long moment and then asked, "Where's your bird at?"

Tommy shrugged as he began work on another crown, this one made of blues and purples. "Probably getting a meal of her own. She'll be back soon."

With that, Techno let the conversation drop.

Meanwhile unbeknownst to the three, a woman stood just out of sight along the tree line. There were tears in her eyes as she watched her sons. Eventually she softly sang to herself.

Did you get enough love, my little dove

Why do you cry?

And I'm sorry I left, but it was for the best

Though it never felt right

My little Versailles

The woman let her head rest against the tree she was leaning against and smiled, her eyes darting to the castle in the distance.

"I'll bring them home to you, my angel," she said softly and hoped that somehow, in some way he could hear her.

“No, ” Ranboo said, exasperated as he pulled another book from the shelf. Meanwhile his partner was practically bouncing on the balls of his feet.

“Alright but consider this! You could say ‘*Yes*’.”

“Tubbo...” Ranboo rolled his eyes, “You’re dad would kill you, and then me, and then me *again*. And then my siblings would kill me.”

“The horses know where they are, they could track the princes down!” Tubbo explained, and then grabbed the hybrid’s arm, tugging him away from his book.

“It’s a good plan.”

“It’s a terrible plan, Tubbo. We are not qualified to go after them. Neither of us can fight-”

“That’s not true.” Tubbo argued.

Ranboo sighed, “Not well! I’ve only been training with him for a little under a year!” “And you’re *good*! I’ve seen you fight! You can hold your own if something happens.”

“It’s not a matter of whether or not I can defend myself. The issue is, could I protect you?”

“I don’t need anyone to protect me, Ran. I’m not some damsel in distress. I can throw a good punch,” Tubbo hissed and Ranboo bit the inside of his cheek harshly.

“My decision stands. It’s too dangerous.”

Tubbo nearly knocked over his chair in anger as he stood from the table, while Ranboo stared at the wall, unmoving.

“Coward.”

Ranboo whipped his head over to Tubbo and hissed, “Maybe. But if you try to go after them. I’ll tell the Chancellor.”

“They’re all I have left of him, Ranboo. Why can’t you understand that?” Tubbo whispered, the anger in his voice suddenly gone and Ranboo felt the first chip in his resolve.

“Don’t do that. Don’t guilt me into this, Tubbo.”

“My duty is to my emperor and his sons. I would lay down my life for all of them. I need to do this, Ranboo.” Tubbo placed a hand on Ranboo’s shoulder.

“I can’t let you get hurt. I won’t. Theseus wouldn’t want that.” Ranboo turned to him, with tears in his eyes.

Tubbo bit his cheek and slammed his fist against the table. His forehead made a thumping noise when he set it against the table.

After a long moment of tense silence Tubbo inhaled sharply and sat back up. He turned to Ranboo and squeezed his arm, his voice cracking as he spoke, “I didn’t mean it, what I said.”

“Yeah, I know,” Ranboo reassured. “But let Sam and Puffy handle this. It’s what they were trained to do.”

Tubbo’s eyes hardened, but the ramling nodded nonetheless and sat back down at the table. He said nothing more for a while until about half an hour later when he suddenly snapped his book shut, causing Ranboo to jump.

“I forgot! I have lunch with my dad soon, I’ll see you later tonight, Boo.” Tubbo jumped up from where they had moved to comfortably read on the floor.

“Uh...okay?” Ranboo said, a bit baffled but said nothing more as his best friend darted from the room.



The more of the world Tommy got to see, the more he was convinced Dream was simply mistaken. This place was beautiful and so far no alarm bells of any danger had rung in his mind. Things seemed...peaceful. Wilbur and Techno were so much different from Dream.

Dream had always been distant towards him much to his dismay. There had always been a thick wall between the two that Tommy had never been able to break through.

He didn't see that wall between Wilbur and Techno.

Technoblade was stoic and blunt but still had a small softer side from what he'd seen. He seemed to be the more level-headed of the twins.

Wilbur was...well he was still working on how he felt about Wilbur. The only adjectives he had for the man at the moment were uptight and sullen. But he was also quite witty and easily kept up with his chatter.

Tommy hadn't exactly hit it off with the man after the stunt he pulled with the necklace, but at least Wilbur wasn't glaring daggers at him anymore. In fact, he didn't look at him at all.

"So where do we go from here?" Tommy chimed once everything had been packed up and they had made their way back into the woods. He saw Techno look to the sky for a moment and then took out a brass compass from his pocket.

"For now we keep heading north till we reach the river. Then we follow it upstream to we hit an old mining shaft that travels up and over the mountain. Then it's a straight shot to L'Manburg. We probably arrive somewhere around the late afternoon tomorrow."

Wilbur snorted, "Can't wait to see the look on Dad's face when we bring home a raccoon."

"I'm not a fuckin' raccoon, bitch," Tommy hissed.

Techno gave a small chuckle and then his tone dropped as he turned to Wilbur. “Are *you* ready though?”

Tommy frowned at the sudden seriousness in Techno’s voice, and as he looked to Wilbur he could see grief in his eyes. Wilbur nodded solemnly and that was the end of it.

Tommy had been taught by Dream not to pry, but goddamn if it wasn’t so infuriatingly tempting at that moment.

Trying to break the suddenly grim atmosphere, Tommy asked, “But I thought the deal was that you would take me to the ceremony and then back?”

“Yes, and we will. But the event doesn’t take place for another couple of days, or did you forget?” Techno eyed him curiously.

Tommy had indeed forgotten to consider that.

Yeah, Dream will definitely be back by then. His birthday was in four days.

Shit.

The teen wanted to smack himself across the face for forgetting when his own fucking birthday was.

God I am so fucking screwed when I get home.

“Your highness,” Schlatt said smoothly as he walked into the library to the desk Ranboo was sitting at. His notes and books sprawled across the table in a very messy manner that was noticeably out of character for the lad.

Usually his son was the messy one. Taking a closer look, the boy seemed on edge, his long hair was spilling out from where it was normally tucked beneath his scarf and there was a slight tremor in his hands.

Ranboo straightened up in his chair, his eyes wide like a deer as he stammered, “C-Chancellor, what can I help you with?”

“Is Tubbo around? He said he’d meet me for lunch but he never showed.”

The enderling’s brow furrowed in confusion, “But I thought...I mean he said...” And Schlatt could pinpoint the exact moment when something clicked in his brain. He gripped his pen tightly and his eyes somehow went even wider as horror dawned on his expression.

“Ranboo?” Schlatt tilted his head and snapped his fingers in front of the boy’s face.

Ranboo seemed far away in that moment but his eyes flickered to Schlatt and the teen uttered, “*Oh...dammit.*”

Ranboo let the pen fall from his hand and buried his hands into his hair, beginning to panic.

“Ranboo, where is my son?” Schlatt gently grabbed the boy’s shoulder but his tone was stern as fear boiled in his gut.

“He...he said...Oh why didn’t I keep an eye on him?” Ranboo groaned, placing his hands over his eyes. Schlatt backed off, unsure of how to handle the panicking prince. He was pretty sure he was the last person in the castle that was qualified to calm him down.

“Woah, easy kid. What do you mean ‘keep an eye on him’?” Schlatt said, trying to keep his voice calm. Ranboo didn’t remove his hands from his eyes but the boy shook his head.

“He wanted...to 𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃. 𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃,” Ranboo trailed off into a language Schlatt couldn’t even begin to understand. Was this just a panic attack...or?

He knew Ranboo had pretty bad anxiety from what Tubbo had said about him, but Schlatt had never thought to ask why. Tubbo had simply mentioned one night that when Ranboo got upset or scared something would happen...something weird.

Yeah, I think this qualifies as weird.

“Uh, kid? Wanna try that sentence again?”

It was then that Ranboo took his hands away from his face and bright violet eyes that were almost glowing stared back blankly. *Okay, purple eyes. That’s new.*

Ranboo looked confused but he tried again, “𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃. 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃. 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃. 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃. 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃. 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃. 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃 𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃𐄂𐄃.”

Schlatt nodded, “Yeah still have no idea what the fuck you’re saying, your Highness.”

With that, Schlatt grabbed one of Ranboo’s open notebooks from his desk along with his pen and handed it to him, “Try writing it out.”

The prince nodded weakly and crouched to the floor awkwardly so he could bear down on the paper as he wrote down shakily, “*Princes.*”

“Princes...” Schlatt said flatly and then the realization of the word set in. He turned away, not wanting to let the boy see the gut-wrenching fear on his face.

The princes.

Tubbo.

Ranboo freaking the fuck out.

Tubbo had run off to find Techno and Wilbur. *Alone.*

His son who barely looked older than fourteen. Who weighed a hundred and ten pounds at the most. Who *definitely* could be identified as the Chancellor's kid if he ran into the wrong person.

The kid could throw a punch, but what is a sixteen-year-old boy armed with a few contraptions against a vengeful attacker with a sword or a group of thugs looking for an easy target?

Schlatt clenched his jaw for a long moment, waiting until his emotions were reigned in and his resolve was set with some form of plan that was more complex than him taking off blindly in hopes of finding him. He turned back to Ranboo, about to announce that he was taking him to Phil only to find the notebook sitting on the floor and The Ender Prince nowhere to be found.

"Oh for fuck's sake..."

Chapter End Notes

honey i lost the kids

ty you guys sm for all your love and support for this fic it means so much to me<3

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

When I Don't Remember You

Chapter Notes

this is what happens when i'm left unsupervised at 3am

have fun crying

TW: Alcohol, Mentions of Past Abuse, Gore

again have fun crying

While my dear @soulswwmmr (arbitersart) did not beta read this chapter. I want you to follow her anyway because he's the best<3

Word Count: 7,800

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So... Wilbur, where are you and Techno from?” Tommy asked sheepishly, clasping his hands behind his back as he trailed next to the brunette.

Wilbur faltered for less than a second before leaning his head back to side-eye him. The brunette’s eyes softened for a split second but then hardened back to something akin to a glare as he sneered, “Sorry, kid. I’m afraid our backstories are off the table, but I must say we’re getting rather curious about yours.”

Crow gave Wilbur a warning squawk at that and Wilbur’s smug façade quickly dissipated, not wanting to piss off the bird again. Tommy snorted back a laugh when Crow then flew to Wilbur’s shoulder, much to the man’s dismay. He cringed his face away from the bird, trying not to make it obvious how intimidated he was by her.

“She’s...uh...she’s not gonna peck my eyes out right?” Wilbur asked cautiously, eyeing Tommy with a panicked expression.

“To be honest, I think she rather likes you. She never flies onto my brother’s shoulder.”

“Your brother...” Techno called from a few feet ahead of them, and Tommy felt his stomach curl with anxiety over what questions about Dream he might ask. How the hell was one meant to talk about the life he’d lead without opening up a whole can of worms? So many secrets to dodge around that it would be a nightmare trying to explain it all.

He hadn’t exactly had a happy childhood that much he knew. But it wasn’t their place to know that. They were strangers after all.

And Dream wasn’t a bad brother. *He wasn’t*. He was his protector. He’d saved him. But he was unsure of how anyone else would view their strained relationship.

Techno opened his mouth to speak but to his surprise, it was Wilbur who swiftly cut in. “In all fairness, if he doesn’t get to ask us about our life, I suppose we shouldn’t pry into his. Unless you’re comfortable with it, right?”

Tommy stared at the brunette for a long moment, surprised. He hadn’t expected Wilbur of all people to understand. And then it hit him, Wilbur who was cold and sullen at first glance, knew how to read people like the back of his hand. He’d even done it to Tommy earlier in the tower. When Techno didn’t seem to understand that he had been scared of him, Wilbur had caught on almost instantly.

And then there was the incident with the bruise on Tommy’s arm, which Wilbur had immediately become suspicious of. *Dream never means to hurt me. It was just an accident. He forgets I’m as small as I am sometimes.*

Something in his gut twisted painfully at that thought.

Tommy nodded gratefully to the man, giving him a small smile. Meanwhile, Technoblade merely shrugged and continued on ahead.

“You’re not as much of a bitch as you pretend you are.” Tommy said casually and Wilbur scoffed, “Don’t be so naive. I don’t trust people easily is all. And that necklace is special to me. You can understand why I’d be pissed.”

“I’m sorry I did that. But this was the only way I could ensure my own safety. I don’t know you and you don’t know me. If something happens to me while I’m in your company, then we both lose,” Tommy explained.

Wilbur simply shoved his hands inside the pockets of his trench coat and scowled.

Tommy wrinkled his nose. “If you don’t mind me asking, what is so special about the necklace?”

Wilbur stiffened at that and any progress he had made with the man vanished like a wisp of smoke as the man hissed at him, “I do mind, in fact.”

He shrugged Crow off of his shoulder and picked up his pace leaving Tommy alone. The teen called out remorsefully, “I’m sorry.” *Sorry? What the hell am I sorry for? He’s the one who got upset over a question.*

“It’s fine. Let’s just get this over with then,” Wilbur growled, turning his head back slightly towards him, and then added, “I don’t have to like you but I’ll hold up my end of the bargain as long as you hold up yours.”

“For fuck’s sake, Wil. Stop being an asshole for five minutes, would you?” Techno suddenly barked and Tommy jumped a bit at the surprisingly loud tone from the normally soft-spoken man.

Techno held back a bit so Wilbur could catch up to him. The pink-haired man grabbed him by the shoulder and growled something to him that was almost too low for him to hear but he managed to pick up a few words. “...not fair to him just because...”

Wilbur jerked away, his face enraged, and suddenly Tommy wanted to be anywhere but here. He didn’t want to hear their angry fighting and the hurtful insults they might throw at each other. Physical fights were terrible of course, but nothing hurt worse than words. And whether or not they were directed at him, he didn’t want to hear them. Tommy clamped his hands over his ears and squeezed his eyes shut, waiting for it to be over.

It hadn’t even been half a minute before he felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. Tommy refused to open his eyes, he didn’t trust that Dream wouldn’t...*wait no...that’s not...*

Another hand carefully grabbed his uninjured wrist and slightly pulled away the hand covering his ear.

“Tommy, don’t be afraid. It’s okay, Tommy. You’re alright.” A gentle gruff voice soothed.

Technoblade.

“We didn’t mean to scare you. You’re safe, okay?”

Tommy pried open an eye and saw Techno standing in front of him, the anger on his face had vanished entirely leaving only concern in his eyes. Wilbur stood a few feet back with an expression of pure guilt.

The teen’s hands shook as he slowly dropped them from his ears with Techno letting go of his wrist almost instantly.

“It was just an argument, Tommy. Wilbur won’t hurt me or you. I shouldn’t have set him off like that, it was my fault.”

“No, it wasn’t. I’m a grown-ass adult who acted like a child. I shouldn’t have gotten upset in the first place.” Wilbur looked at the ground as he spoke but then his eyes briefly flickered up to Tommy to give him a small apologetic smile.

Tommy nodded and pulled back, wrapping his arms around himself, suddenly embarrassed by his reaction.

Techno’s hand lingered for a moment before he too pulled away and asked, “Are you okay to keep going?”

There was a double meaning to that sentence.

‘Do you need to stop for a minute to compose yourself?’ was one option while the other asked, ‘*Do you want to go home?*’

Tommy didn’t want their pity and he definitely did not want to go home. He shook his head firmly and wiped away as much vulnerability as he could from his face.

“No. I can keep going.” Tommy said, determination laced in his voice.

I have to.

He wasn’t sure how exactly he had made his way down to the stables or how he’d stumbled past so many guards at all. All he knew, was that the moment he returned to his senses was the moment he found himself standing in front of Carl’s pen.

The horse whinnied happily at the sight of his owner’s protégé. Ranboo gave him a small smile and gently pet him on the nose. “Hey Carl, how are you today?”

He reached into his satchel he definitely didn’t remember filling up with supplies and handed him a golden carrot.

“Well, at least *other-me* and I are on the same page,” Ranboo said shaking his head. He hated when he enderwalked. It was annoying, inconvenient and above all, it was *dangerous*. Not just for him but for others.

He hoped Schlatt was alright.

The last thing he’d seen before it had gone dark was Schlatt’s expression of pure terror the moment he’d realized Tubbo was missing. He was almost positive it was Tubbo that had triggered his enderwalk, but there was no time for him to speculate over what he might have done during the blank period that spanned from then to now.

He had to get his partner back.

“Carl.” Ranboo soothed, gently brushing his fingers through his thick mane, “Can you help me find Ossium?”

Tubbo had fled the palace an hour earlier with the horse, presumably too afraid of Carl bucking him even to try riding him. To be honest, Ranboo was a little worried as well. Carl never let anyone but Techno ride him.

Carl huffed, unsure and Ranboo nodded patiently and then pleaded, “Please, I need to find Tubbo, Carl. He has Ossium and he could be in grave danger. And then afterward, once we find him, we will go find Technoblade. *I promise.*”

The horse’s eyes lit up at the mention of his owner and Ranboo grinned, “Thank you, Carl. I promise to give you a bucket load of carrots when we get home.”

With that, Ranboo saddled up Carl and hopped on. He spent a moment steadying the horse, testing to see if he would buck him or not. When the horse gave no reaction, he smiled and pet his head. “Good boy.” He was about to take off when he heard the yelling of palace guards.

Uh oh.

“Go, Carl, go!” Ranboo urged and Carl took off like a bolt of lightning just as the guards flooded the stable in search of the Ender Prince.

As Carl leaped over the fence gate, Ranboo looked back at the swarm of guards frantically trying to gather their own horses to chase after him. It was futile, however. There wasn’t a horse in the realm as fast as Carl. Ranboo sighed and looked over the horizon to the dense forest that sat just beyond the kingdom border.

Goddess above, he wished he didn’t have the status that he did.

It was almost useless to him anyways. The people he had been meant to rule over were long gone, already integrated into the overworld. The only remnants of the End People were the Endermen. While maybe they had once resembled a person, their sentience had long been forgotten. The only sign of life the End showed now was the End Cities that were overrun with shulkers and the droneless enderman who roamed across the land.

Anyone who hadn't left the End when the portal had still been open, had been doomed to become one. Even Ranboo had moments where he lost his mind to the power of the End. The End was just as the name suggested. The end to all hope. The end to all choice. The end to all life. It was why he'd asked Phil to close it permanently.

He'd seen it once. What his birthplace had become. It wasn't what the stories had described. The enderman no longer bowed in respect to Philza for his deed of freeing them. They were the hostile husks of ghosts that were long gone.

His mother had died trying to save her remaining people from that fate and she'd succeeded. Her people happily lived as part of the Antarctic Empire and Ranboo acted as more of an ambassador for them than a prince. But they adored him regardless and he had done nothing to deserve it.

He was more than happy to let Phil rule what was meant to be his. He knew in his heart he was never meant to be a King. He'd settle happily as being part of their family. He'd found his own in the form of Jack and Niki who treated him as blood. Who bossed him around and teased him, who loved and cared for him. And then when Jack had become deathly ill, he'd met Theseus.

Who had changed his entire life just by handing him a simple blue scarf.

Phil's broken family had accepted him gladly and Tubbo never left his side from that day forth, until now.

And so, while in his mind he rode to find Tubbo for Theseus, he knew deep down as he rode away from the castle that the true reason for his actions was that he couldn't bear to lose his best friend.

“Do you hear that, Tommy?” Wilbur asked, pacing next to him. Tommy stopped for a moment and listened to the loud rushing sound of water running swiftly over rocks.

“Is it...a river?” Tommy asked, leaning over a bit to try and hear better.

“Better than that, it’s the river that runs over the mineshaft that leads us to L’Manburg,” Wilbur said confidently. Tommy nodded but then asked,

“Wait...uh...what’s a mineshaft?”

He expected Wilbur and Techno to look at him like he was some kind of an idiot for his question, but instead, Techno merely answered, “It’s where miners went to get minerals such as gold, diamonds, iron, et cetera. It’s also the only passageway I know of that gets us back up the mountain.”

“So...it’s like a giant tunnel?” Tommy asked and Techno nodded, “They usually go pretty deep but we’re only going to take the passageway that leads to the other side of the river. But um...we still need to be careful, I’m not entirely sure how sturdy these are after a few decades of disuse. And part of the mineshaft still runs beneath the river so it could be flooded.”

Oh, wonderful. I don’t fucking know how to swim.

Tommy paled at that but Techno reassured him, “As long as it isn’t underwater and it’s just the three of us, plus one bird, we should be fine. Unless...” Techno turned to eye Wilbur.

“I doubt they would come this far out.” Wilbur shook his head and this time, Tommy had to ask, “Who would come this far out?”

Wilbur and Techno shifted nervously for a few moments before Wilbur eventually muttered, “We kinda...also ran off from home. Our father has sent people out to find us so when we get to the other side of the river, we need to be careful. I’d much rather make it back home on our own than have the search parties drag us back.”

“Oh,” Tommy replied, a bit unsure of how to respond to that. Instead, he asked, “Wouldn’t it be quicker just to let the search parties take us?”

“I mean yeah but then you’d miss all the scenery and where’s the fun in that?” Techno defended with a smile and after a moment Tommy nodded, “Yeah, I guess you have a point there, Big T.”

Techno quirked his head at the nickname but didn’t comment on it. The three walked for a few minutes upstream with Tommy stopping ever so often to look in awe at the fish that would leap out of the river and back in again.

At some point, Technoblade stopped and pointed up to a cliff maybe fifty feet high. “See that? That’s where we need to be, This is the shorter side of the mountain and the mineshaft will make it easy for us to get in and out.”

Wilbur ran back down from where he’d scouted ahead and shouted, “Hey guys! Mineshaft’s over here, seems clear.”

“Did you make a torch?” Techno yelled and Wilbur laughed, “That’s on you, big guy.”

“Lazy bastard.” Techno rolled his eyes and handed Tommy his pack. The pink-haired man searched around the ground for a moment before picking up a rather larger stick. He looked around himself for a moment before sighing and asked, “Any chance you’re willing to give up that scarf for a torch.”

“Dude, it’s fucking cold out here.”

“Yeah? Well, it’ll be fucking dark in there unless I get some cloth.” Techno retorted.

“Oh, don’t hassle him hold on.” Wilbur ran over to them and muttered. He grabbed his pocket knife and then pulled out the untucked bit of his shirt beneath his vest. Using the knife he carefully sliced a sizable chunk of fabric for Techno and gave it to him.

Tommy sighed after a moment and opened his hand for the knife. Wilbur gave it to him and Tommy cut off a strip of his scarf.

“Thank you both for your sacrifices,” Technoblade said giving a mock bow, and then grabbed a match.

“Now let there be light.”

“Wait till we get inside the cave, idiot,” Wilbur teased smacking the lit match from his hand. Techno simply frowned and let the simmering match fall to the ground before muttering, “Dickhead.”

Tommy couldn’t help but giggle at their brotherly antics that he strangely felt included in. It felt... nice.

Tommy didn’t know it yet but it felt like home.

They rounded the corner and Tommy’s eyes widened at the sight of a large doorframe-like structure built into the side of the mountain. Techno was right, it really didn’t look all that safe.

“Are you sure we’re not going to die in there?” asked the blonde, fiddling nervously with the end of his ponytail.

“I give us about a seventy-five percent survival rate.” Wilbur chuckled at Tommy’s side, his arms crossed.

“Better than nothing I suppose...” He turned to Crow who had been pretty quiet up until now and gently pet her wings while asking, “You ready, Crow?”

The bird chirped back and hopped around on his shoulder causing Tommy to laugh.

“Hey, kid, help me with these boards real quick,” Techno said as he started pulling away at the rotted wood that blocked the entrance of the mineshaft. Crow flew over to Wilbur’s shoulder, who was making sure their packs were secure so nothing would fall out while they traversed the mine.

The man stiffened a bit at the bird but didn’t say anything about it. Tommy smiled to himself and began tugging away at the boards, wincing as he felt his hands splinter.

The boy pulled away the last board and stood to his feet. He winced as he pulled out the wooden shards embedded in his palm and turned to Techno. “Do you know your way out of the mineshaft?”

“In theory,” Techno said, laughing dryly. Tommy shifted nervously as he looked into the dark tunnel. He swallowed, then felt a hand pat his shoulder gently. “Relax, we said we’d keep you safe didn’t we?”

The boy nodded, grateful, then turned to see Wilbur joining them, their packs in hand. Tommy took his own and secured it to his waist while Techno worked to light the torch.

Once lit, they entered the mineshaft, as a green-cloaked man stared at them from a distance. A deep frown upon his face beneath his mask.

The first thing Tommy noticed about the mineshaft was the sheer amount of cobwebs that littered the floors and ceilings. Suddenly, Tommy was grateful he was wearing shoes.

A knot settled in his gut and his chest grew tight as he drew further inside the mineshaft. He felt contained, trapped by the walls that seemed to grow smaller and smaller every step of the way. His breathing picked up as the thought of never finding his way out echoed inside his mind.

You’ve lived in a tower your whole life.

You’re used to this.

Calm down.

The thought of never seeing daylight again.

Only darkness.

What if he lost Wilbur and Techno in the dark and they left him? He'd be alone.

Alone in the dark, lost forever inside a tomb.

"Tommy?" questioned Wilbur, pulling the boy from his thoughts. He looked to the brunette who appeared rather confused and then down at the death grip he had on Wilbur's sleeve.

"Sorry!" Tommy exclaimed, quickly snatching his hand back as he looked away. There was a long moment of deafening silence and Tommy felt his face heat up in embarrassment. That was until he felt a hand wrap delicately around his wrist, taking special care not to squeeze the bruise from Dream.

Tommy turned, his eyes wide, and saw Wilbur staring straight ahead, refusing to meet his gaze. Warmth pooled in his chest at the action and he smiled to himself.

And for the first time in quite a while, Tommy felt...safe.

Eventually, the three made it to a wider section of the mineshaft that branched off into two different paths and as Tommy moved to take a step forward, Wilbur tugged him back by the back of his shirt, rather than the hand he still had wrapped around his wrist.

"Shit," Techno cursed and Tommy then noticed what the problem was.

The entire floor of the room had collapsed and flooded. The water level sat just below the doorway making it impossible to reach the other side.

“What do we do?” Wilbur asked, releasing Tommy’s hand. The blonde tried not to mourn the loss of contact as he shuffled to the side, allowing Wilbur to stand next to his twin.

“We’ll have to swim...I just don’t know how we will be able to save the torch.”

“I feel like now is a really good time to mention that I don’t know how to swim,” Tommy said, giving a nervous laugh.

Techno sighed and looked at Wilbur, mumbling, “I won’t be able to keep him afloat with the gear weighing me down.”

“I can try to, I suppose. The distance isn’t too far, but will you be able to keep the torch out of the water?” Wilbur asked and suddenly Tommy noticed something very convenient leaning up against the wall next to the brunette.

He shoved Wilbur over and swatted away the cobwebs with his frying pan. He then tugged the wooden platform off the wall and asked with a lopsided grin on his face. “Will this work? I could sit on it and hold the torch while you two push me over. I can keep the gear dry as well.”

Techno tilted his head to look at Tommy for a moment and then looked at Wilbur. Eventually, he nodded, “Think you’ll be able to keep balance? It’ll be a wobbly ride.”

“It’ll be easier than trying to swim.” Tommy shrugged and handed the platform to Techno who set it down into the water. He handed his torch and gear over to Wilbur and jumped in.

When he surfaced the man sputtered, “Gods it’s freezing! I might die of hypothermia before I make it over.”

“Oh, don’t be such a baby. Steady the raft for Tommy would you?” Wilbur said, rolling his eyes. Techno scowled at him.

Tommy carefully knelt on the ground and crawled till he was at the edge. He steadied his hands on the center of the raft and quickly pulled his knees in. He wobbled borderline violently for a moment

as he sat down more comfortably and then sighed in relief when the raft didn't turtle or capsize.

"Alright, hand me the packs."

Wilbur set Techno's and his own pack into Tommy's lap and then handed him the torch. Crow flew over to his shoulder as Techno pulled him along a bit, giving Wilbur space to hop in.

The brunette resurfaced and screeched, "*Holy fucking shit! Holy shit that's cold!*"

Tommy giggled as Techno teased him, "Now who's being a baby?"

"Oh, fuck off. I hate both of you." Wilbur growled and then grabbed the edge of the raft, helping Techno pull Tommy to the other side. When they had made it to the other side, Tommy handed Wilbur the torch and threw their packs over before carefully climbing out, landing firmly on steady ground. Once upright he grabbed the torch from Wilbur and moved back so the twins could get up.

Techno effortlessly pulled himself up out of the water and then turned to pull his brother up who stuck his tongue out childishly at him. Tommy couldn't help but snicker at the sight of the two, who were completely drenched.

"You both look so stupid, like two birds who fell into a lake." Tommy grinned and Wilbur hissed at him, "Next time I'm letting you drown, you little gremlin."

Tommy cracked a smile as he handed the torch back to Techno. As soon as it was out of his hands, Wilbur shook himself out like a wet dog next to Tommy, splashing him.

"*You bitch!*" Tommy laughed, shivering as the cold water hit him. He shoved the man away but not before Wilbur could wring the water out of his trench coat overtop his head.

"I hate you. I should've pushed you out of my tower the moment I saw your stupid mug!" Tommy grumbled at his now soaking-wet hair. Wilbur grinned and stretched out his hand, presumably about to ruffle his hair and mess it up, but then he paused. His crimson eyes were suddenly far away for a long moment before he frowned and pulled back.

“Wilbur?” Tommy tilted his head and Wilbur stared at him as if suddenly his presence was painful. Techno turned around and his expression softened at his twin. He looked at Tommy and said gently, “Kid, why don’t you walk next to me for a while.”

It wasn’t a question. Tommy looked at Wilbur with confusion one more time before moving to Techno’s side. Wilbur took the torch from his brother and strode ahead of the two, leading the way. Meanwhile, Tommy’s shoulders slumped and he whispered, “Did I do something wrong?”

Technoblade shook his head at him. “No, Tommy, you did nothing wrong. Wilbur just remembered something painful is all, he’ll be okay. It’s not your fault.”

“Did he remember it because of me?”

Techno tilted his head to look at the teen for a moment and Tommy’s heart sank when he saw the same expression Wilbur had given him.

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay, Tommy.” Techno faced ahead, no longer meeting Tommy’s gaze. “You just remind us of somebody who died a long time ago. Well...you look like him at least.”

Tommy looked to the ground, unsure of what to say. Was he supposed to apologize...or?

“Can I ask who?” His voice wobbled, fully expecting Techno to get angry. Instead, he heard a choked sound come from Techno, his eyes filled with grief. The man looked at him and whispered, “He was the owner of the necklace you took.”

Oh.

Well, fuck me I guess.

Nobody spoke for a long time after that.

“You can’t go after Ranboo, it’s too risky. We’ve already lost the princes, we can’t afford to lose either of you.” Puffy tapped her foot, frustrated as she stood in Phil’s office. Schlatt turned his gaze downward and spoke coldly, “I lost my son as well.”

Puffy flinched but nodded to him apologetically. Phil slapped a hand to his forehead as he stood at his window.

“This is a nightmare. The kids are gone, all of them. And you’re telling me I can’t go after them? Do you expect me to sit here like a pawn waiting for its next play? *I am the Angel of Death*. I do not need your fucking protection nor your permission,” Phil growled, his hat clutched tightly in his fist.

“If you go, then Schlatt will follow because he’s Schlatt.” The ram snorted at the sentence but nodded, allowing the sheep to continue. “And then we have nobody. Wilbur and Techno are nowhere to be found and now Ranboo and Tubbo are gone as well. Without you here, the kingdom is without a ruler.” Puffy’s head hung low, a deep sadness was present in her posture as she held her own hat loosely in her hands.

“To hell with it then!” Philza suddenly walked over and slammed his hands on the desk as he hissed, “My kids are *gone*. My entire family is *gone*. If I can’t go, *then find our goddamn kids*. All four of them. I want them home *now* .”

“Throwing a tantrum won’t get your sons home any faster, *your majesty*” Puffy spat back pointedly. “You have a responsibility to this country and I will not let the kingdom that I watched *your wife* create while you slept fall to ruin.”

“*Get the hell out of my office, Captain,*” Phil growled darkly, his eyes shadowed by his bangs. If it had been anyone else besides Puffy, they would’ve been scared shitless at the sight. But instead, Puffy’s eyes flashed angrily and she gave Phil a bow that was for pure show. With that, she left. presumably to take out a new party to find the boys.

“She’s right you know,” Schlatt said smoothly after a time, throwing back another shot from the whiskey bottle he’d been slowly making his way through from the moment Tubbo had gone missing.

Philza hissed at the man, “Not you too. I don’t need either of you breathing down my neck.”

Schlatt’s head turned sharply and the man snarled, “You’re not the only one who has lost their child. Your sons are at least able to defend themselves. Tubbo could be lying dead in an alleyway somewhere. Do you know how painful it is to know that his fate lies in the hands of a sixteen-year-old boy?”

The ram stood to his feet with the bottle in his hand, “If Tubbo dies…” His voice trailed off, his eyes hazy for a long moment before he snapped at him, “Then I have nothing. And that’s on *you*. I already almost lost him once, and that alone nearly killed me.”

His hand clutched tightly around Tubbo’s as he sat by his bedside. His son’s face was bandaged tightly and there was a tube down his throat to keep him breathing.

He was so...tiny. The bed seemed to dwarf the ten-year-old and Schlatt buried his face in his hands. The explosive had been meant for Techno. Someone had rigged it to explode the moment fire touched the string. But Tubbo was so curious, always so damn curious.

Schlatt had only left him for maybe ten minutes, with Techno watching over him. Later he would tell himself, that it wasn’t the prince’s fault. How could he have possibly known?

Tubbo had attempted to dismantle one of the rockets so he could study how it worked for a new project he had been working on. He didn’t have matches nor a means to light the damned thing, there shouldn’t have been any danger.

He had only been gone for ten minutes.

Ten fucking minutes.

And that's all it had taken for his son's life to narrowly come to a violent halt.

The moment he had unscrewed the head of the rocket, the entire contraption exploded sending Tubbo off with a bang.

Schlatt had smelled death before. How could he not with the position he held? He'd seen war. He'd seen the Angel of Death kill before his very eyes.

But despite that, he didn't think anything would ever rival the smell of burning flesh. Nor the labored sounds of his son's breath.

The chancellor would never forget the fear he felt when the then sixteen-year-old Techno had burst into his office with tears streaming down his face. His son's limp form was clutched tightly in his arms and apologies spilled endlessly from the boy's mouth.

He remembered tuning the frantic voice out and staring at Tubbo.

He looked dead.

His eyes were open wide and his face was a charred mess. The face that he had loved everyday since the first moment he'd seen him. The face that brought out the best parts of him, the softer side that wasn't nearly as rough or as flawed.

The face of his son. Tubbo.

His perfect Tubbo.

It was at that moment that he truly understood the pain Philza felt constantly over Theseus. The guilt. The knowledge that you had failed your child.

His son's face would be an everyday reminder to both himself and Technoblade of their failures.

But at the very least, his son was still alive.

Schlatt's voice was dead as he stood to his feet, swaying ever so slightly. He set the bottle down on Phil's desk and said, "You can't help them. Their fate is in their own hands now. So do yourself a favor and forget for a while."

He exited the room, leaving Philza feeling more alone than ever before.

"Do you hear that?" Wilbur asked after nearly thirty minutes of pure tense silence. The man stopped, his ears flickering upward towards the roof as he listened intently.

Tommy frowned and shook his head, while Techno mimicked Wilbur. His eyes widened and he looked back at his brother.

"It sounds like...rumbling?" Techno said warily and Tommy paled, instinctively grabbing onto Techno's sleeve as his voice warbled, "A flood? A cave-in?"

"Horses." Wilbur said suddenly, his face unreadable as he stared back at Techno, horror dawning on his expression, "Tech, it's fucking *horses!*"

Techno clenched his jaw anxiously.

"It's Sam and Puffy. They're going to cave the bloody river in. We are right under it!"

Tommy panicked as he looked back and forth between the twins, searching for a solution. "What do we do?!" He winced when Techno grabbed his arm and tugged him forward, forcing him to move. When Tommy's feet remained still, essentially allowing Techno to drag him, Wilbur huffed and drew back. He grabbed the boy by his shoulders and shook him.

“Tom-Tommy, we’ve got to get the hell out of here. The cave is going to come down on top of us if we don’t move. Do you understand me?”

After a moment of blank staring, the boy nodded and Wilbur grabbed his hand tightly. He spoke sternly, “No matter what happens. Do not let go of my hand, okay?”

Tommy nodded again but Wilbur shook his head. “*I need you to say it.*”

Tommy swallowed at the way Wilbur’s chin wobbled when he spoke but he replied, “*I won’t let go.*”

And then they were running. Crow had tucked herself away into the fur of Techno’s hood, keeping herself from falling off or getting buried as they ran. Tommy called out fretfully as the ground beneath them shook, “Techno! Don’t let her fall out! I won’t leave Crow behind. Protect her!”

“I’ve got her, Tommy! Just keep going! We’re nearly there!”

Now Tommy could hear it.

What sounded like hundreds of thunderous hooves stamped along the river bank shook Tommy to his core. The force sent dirt and gravel raining down upon them with every thud. He was blinded for a moment when some gravel landed in his eyes and he cried out.

He used his scarf to wipe it away as he narrowly dodged some of the wooden frameworks from the tunnel that was crumbling under the pressure.

Wilbur kept harshly tugging him along as he ran blindly through the mine. He stumbled over his feet but kept going. Kept pushing. The only other option was drowning or being buried alive. His hand squeezed Wilbur’s tightly and he clung to it like a lifeline.

Because at that moment. It was.

And then he heard it. A horrible cracking sound as the wooden framework of the mine splintered away, giving way to the river above.

The ceiling behind him caved in and water began rushing in, chasing them down to their death.

“*Go! Go!* Don’t look back, just keep going!” Wilbur screamed and Tommy shouted, “Up ahead! There is a fork in the path which way is out, Techno?!”

“Left! Left! *Go fucking left!* ” The man yelled and Tommy nodded with his heart racing in his chest and his lungs burning. And then the unthinkable happened.

Tommy’s foot caught against a stray piece of plywood that had broken off from the wall and he fell.

He lost his grip on Wilbur’s hand as he was taken under the rocky waves.

“*Tommy! No!* ” Wilbur screeched and Techno turned briefly to see his twin dive back into the water after the kid. And as Techno went left. His brother and Tommy were swept futilely to the right.

“*Wilbur!*” Techno screamed as he tried to turn back to go after the two but by then the unforgiving water had caught up and sent him tumbling down the passageway.

As he was swept up within the waves, two things happened. He grabbed Tommy’s bird from the back of his hood and held her against his chest. Crow called out for Tommy fearfully and all Techno could do was try not to hold her too tightly.

The second thing to happen was his connection to Chat snapped back into place as sharply as a rubber band.

Finally.

“It’s about fucking time! What the hell were you idiots thinking?” Techno yelled angrily as they flooded his brain with worried screams for Wilbur and Tommy.

The water seemed to have headed more toward the right so Techno was able to pull himself to his feet and continue his sprint toward the exit.

Tommy! Tommy!

Wilbur!

Save them!

Save yourself!

Save Tommy!

Save Wilbur!

“Stop fucking screaming, guys! Tell me how to get them out. That path leads to a dead end! I need to help them!”

And as he ran through the corridor, beginning to spot the light at the end of the mineshaft, he listened carefully to Chat’s instructions.

“Tommy!” Wilbur yelled, pushing his head to the surface and spitting foul river water from his mouth. He reached out blindly against the waves, searching for the kid. Searching for the kindhearted boy who seemed afraid of his own shadow one moment and determined to fight it the next. The boy who endlessly baffled him but made his heart warm with a feeling he hadn’t felt in a long time. He dove back under, still violently being tugged by the river towards who knows where.

As he was swamped by the waves, he thought of his father. Of Phil. Gods, what if his last words to him were ones of hate? What if that moment at Theseus's grave was the last time he ever spoke to the man who had raised him?

Dad, I didn't mean it. I love you. I'm so so sorry. I don't want to leave you.

And then his hands met fabric and bony limbs and Wilbur *pulled*.

"*Wil!*" Tommy cried as he was tugged upwards to the surface. Wilbur pulled Tommy up even further so the boy's head was higher than his own. He turned away a bit as the teen began to gag, spewing out water from his mouth, his hands digging into his sides.

"Hang on!" Wilbur yelled and wrapped his arms tightly around the boy.

He clung to the blonde as they were swept into a tall cave. Wilbur spotted a wall of stone they were barreling towards and let out a gasp. He turned Tommy in his arms quickly so that the brunette would take the force of the blow and not him.

Wilbur squeezed his eyes shut, pushed Tommy's head against his chest, and then let out a cry when his back and the side of his head met harsh jagged stone. He held Tommy tightly as the waves splashed up into them and then back, knocking over a large mound of stones that fell down and blocked off the path they'd just come from. It also happened to block off the flow of water just long enough for Wilbur to pull Tommy to his feet.

"Are you okay?!" Wilbur cried, holding the boy's shoulders tightly, looking for injuries. Tommy glanced upwards, his eyes landing on the side of his head. His hand stretched out but the boy hesitated and let it pause in the air. His voice came out soft and dazed. "Your head, Wil."

Wilbur looked down and noticed the teen was holding his other hand to his abdomen. He gently pulled it away, but Tommy quickly assured him, "I hit a rock while I was tumbling, it's just a bruise. But you're...you're bleeding, Wilbur."

Wilbur shook his head, his vision swimming from the motion. He could feel the blood streaming from a wound to his skull down his cheek as he spoke, "Doesn't matter, we need to get out of here."

The water had risen to their knees and Tommy's chin wobbled, pulling away from Wilbur's hands as his voice shook, "I'm so sorry, Wilbur. I'm so sorry. I did this to you. *I did that to you.*" Tommy looked up at the wound on his head again.

The moment his hands were free, Wilbur began to pull at any loose rocks he could feel in the murky water. He turned to Tommy.

"This is not the time to apologize. We're not going to..." He paused and then huffed. "Just help me dig!" Wilbur yelled as he pushed and pulled away at stones, hoping one would lead outside, but it was too dark. He couldn't see a goddamn thing.

The water was at their waist.

"This is all my fault. I'm so sorry." Tommy sobbed as he pulled another stone away. Suddenly Wilbur's voice caught in his throat. There wasn't a way out. Not one he could see.

They were trapped.

He was going to... They were going to...

Oh, gods...

The adrenaline coursing through him left him numb as the realization sunk in. He looked down at his hands and let them splash into the water, defeated. *Now it was time for apologies.* He looked at the boy he had resented since the moment he'd first seen him in that bloody tower and placed a hand on his shoulder, "No, I'm sorry, Tommy. I failed you. I said I would bring you home. I'm so sorry."

Tommy shook his head, his lips already blue and trembling from the cold. Wilbur could do nothing except watch him freeze.

The water was at their chest. The teen looked back at him with an unreadable expression and then he dove beneath the waves. Wilbur's eyes widened in terror. *He can't swim. He can't swim.*

"Tommy!" Wilbur yelled and dove in after him. He reached out and grabbed on tight to the teen, pulling up from the water. He held his face in his hands as he surfaced and spoke softly in a voice that shocked even him. "There's no point, Toms. It's pitch black, down there."

Wilbur couldn't tell if it was tears or water streaming down Tommy's cheeks.

Tommy looked to the roof of the cave and then let his head thud against the stone wall at the words. He let out a strained cry as Wilbur's thumb gently ran across his cheek soothingly. Comfortingly. Just like Phil had done with Techno all those years ago. As comforting as the kiss to his forehead that both he and Techno pretended they hadn't felt when their mother had revived them.

Wilbur looked down at Tommy, into icy blue eyes that reminded him so much of...

He shook his head. Even now, at the brink of his demise, he wouldn't allow himself such hope.

If he was going to die here with Tommy, then he wasn't going to let the boy die afraid. It was the least he could do for him.

"He was right." Tommy rasped, pressing a palm to his own face, trying to fight away the shakiness of his voice. "I never should've done this."

Tommy turned to the brunette and this time, Wilbur could see real tears.

"I'm so sorry, Wilbur."

"Don't be," Wilbur said gently and brushed away some of Tommy's hair from his eyes. The water was at their necks. The man sighed. He might as well let some of his own secrets spill. It's not like they'd live to tell the tale.

Wilbur let his walls down for the first time in a decade.

“I should’ve told you the truth earlier when you asked. I shouldn’t have been so harsh to you. It wasn’t fair. I’m sorry.”

Wilbur took a deep shaky breath, “My brother...”

“Techno?” Tommy asked, confused. Wilbur shook his head, “The necklace. It belonged to my little brother. He died when I was eleven.”

“Oh...” Tommy mouthed and then grabbed at Wilbur when he could no longer touch the ground. Wilbur held him up, keeping him afloat. He wouldn’t let him fall before him.

“I treated you the way I did because I was scared. You just...you remind me of him and I began to...as I started to get closer to you, I thought I was...I don’t even know.” Wilbur paused, looking away briefly before continuing, “You’re just so easy to talk to. So easy to banter with. *I don’t even know you*. But the way you effortlessly wormed your way past my walls scared the hell out of me. I was stupid. I got defensive and tried to block you out. And I shouldn’t have acted like that.”

“It’s okay.” Tommy said, looking up at Wilbur, “I tried to do the same, but you and Techno are nothing like what I expected. Dream told me that everyone outside the tower was cruel and selfish...but you...I mean you’re a bitch, obviously.” Tommy laughed with tears in his eyes and Wilbur couldn’t help but smile.

“But I feel safe with you. Safer than I’ve felt in a long time. And *fuck*, I’ve known you for what? Eight hours? The world can’t possibly be as bad as he said, not that I’ll ever know now. You asked me when you found me why anyone would be looking for me and...” Tommy trailed off, his eyes going wide as he spoke, “... Oh *shit* .”

“Oh shit, what?” Wilbur asked confused and then panicked when he noticed the roof closing in on them.

“Dude!” Tommy shook him, a doomed smile across his face. “My hands' fucking glow! I glow! I’m a goddamn glowstick! I’m so stupid! I didn’t even think about it!” Tommy exclaimed.

“Your hands fucking...*what?*”

Tommy closed his eyes, focusing, and then Wilbur and Tommy sucked in a deep breath as they ran out of space and the water buried them.

Wilbur’s eyes remained closed as they sunk deeper into the water, the teen still gripped tightly against him. He could accept that he would probably die here with Tommy.

He hoped Techno would be okay without him. He hoped he’d take care of Phil. He hoped he would see his mother and Theseus the next time he opened his eyes.

Instead, he saw a warm golden light from beneath his eyelids. He opened his eyes and had to slap a hand over his mouth to contain a gasp at the sight of Tommy.

Who believe it or not.

Did actually fucking glow.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you cried over crimeboys. i really hope you sobbed violently.

this is definitely my favorite chapter besides ch.8. I'm so proud of this one.

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

It's Almost Over, It's Just Begun

Chapter Notes

:D Hope you guys like this one! It's definitely one of my favorites!

TW: Violence and Multiple Character Injuries.

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3

Word Count: 8,200 (its a new record lmao)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“He did what?!” Jack sputtered, leaning his hands against the countertop that had been dusted with flour for something his sister was baking.

“It wasn’t *him* per-se, it was the *other one*,” Sam explained, a bit confused on how to word Ranboo’s enderwalk correctly.

“But Ranboo had the End Prince under control! He hasn’t hurt anyone in nearly two years. And even then it was only one man. One of the men who’d hurt him when he was little.” Niki shook her head, refusing to even consider the possibility that her younger brother had landed four innocent guards in the infirmary. Even if their injuries were minor. “And where is Ranboo? Has he switched back? You didn’t throw him in a cell, did you? *This isn’t his fault.*”

“My lady, we do strange things for the people we care for. But no, we have not found him yet. He escaped through the main gates. None of our horses are fast enough to catch Prince Technoblade’s. Though how he was able to tame the stallion is beyond me,” Sam replied, his suit of armor glinting the deep dull magenta of netherite.

Niki hissed, “You’ll find that my brother is stronger than he looks.”

“I’d never doubt the End Prince’s values, Niki. I know *exactly* how strong Ranboo is,” Sam said.

Jack straightened up, suddenly nervous. “You said Tubbo went missing, right?”

The creeper nodded at him and Jack's heart sank. He muttered, "Stupid kid...He went after Tubbo."

Ranboo could defend himself, yes, but it was so incredibly easy to recognize the kid. He was six foot six and his horns gave him an extra half a foot. He was a walking target.

He was going to get himself killed and Tubbo along with him.

"Why wasn't I summoned? Why the hell am I not out there right now with the rest of the guard?"

Sam shook his head and fiddled with the mask on his face. "Jack, this is a personal matter for you. I can't allow you to-

"Like hell, you can't. That's my little brother. I'm going with you, unless you want to try and stop me?"

He knew damn well that Sam could easily stop him, but he also knew the man didn't have the will to deny him something like this.

Sam sighed and turned away, contemplating what to do for a long moment. Finally, he spoke, "You can't step out of line, Jack. If we do find them, you can't let your heart dictate your actions. You need to think. Otherwise, you will get yourself and your brother killed."

Something flickered in the Warden's expression for a moment and then Sam grinned. "It's a dangerous world out there and Ranboo is a noble, a prince of a lost world. His wings alone would cost a fortune. His head would be worth enough to pay for a castle fit for a king. His long hair, perhaps distributed out to the highest buyers. The Ender prince has his enemies, that's for sure, none of them earned. Ranboo is a kind soul. But poachers don't give a damn. All they see is The Last Dragon and his wings hanging above some rich man's fireplace."

Jack seethed the words of the Warden but he did not heed to the clear taunt. Sam was testing him. He wanted to see if he would break. If he would swing.

It was a test of resilience.

Sam stared at him for a long moment, his eyes conflicted and then he clapped the man's shoulder. "We'll bring your brother home together then." The green-haired man turned to the pink-haired baker who had her head in her hands. "Niki, you okay?"

"Everyone is gone. Wilbur and Techno are missing and now Tubbo and...Ranboo. And you're leaving too, Jack."

Jack's eyes softened and he wrapped an arm around his sister's shoulder and said, "I'll bring him home for you to properly ground forever, okay? He's a smart kid despite what I said earlier. You know how much he cares for Tubbo, he'd protect him to the ends of the earth. Don't stay by yourself, Nik. Go spend time with Quackity and Charlie. I'm sure he misses Wilbur as much as you do."

"I'm sure Q misses him a lot more than me. You know how they are," Niki said with a laugh. She knew how the two looked at each other. She had half a mind to wring Wilbur by the ear for his obliviousness.

"True," Jack laughed and pulled Niki into a brief hug. Niki wrapped her arms tight around her brother and she spoke softly.

"When you find him, tell him...tell him he's in so much trouble for worrying his sister to death. Tell him that he's on laundry duty for a month. Tell him..." Niki trailed off with tears in her eyes. "Tell him to come home so I can give him a proper scolding. And tell him his sister misses him."

Jack nodded and hugged her a bit tighter before letting go, "*Will do*. I wish you could come with me to get Ranboo back. You've one hell of a swing. But there are already enough people away from the palace, someone has to protect the Emperor while we're away."

"I'm pretty sure the Emperor can defend himself just fine." Niki laughed and Jack nodded, "Probably, but still...out of the three of us, you're the force to be reckoned with."

Niki smiled.

What the fuck.

What the fuck.

What the absolute shit fucking hell.

Wilbur stared at the boy in shock for a long moment while Tommy simply rolled his eyes, a pale golden light reflecting off of his face.

It wasn't just that his hands were glowing. *He could see the kid's bones.* Or at least the ones on his hands as the glow faded to his elbows.



Tommy looked down and did his best to swim to the ground with Wilbur following quickly after. There was no time to be dumbfounded by the impossible. They had to survive first.

With the light, Tommy provided from his...*glowing bones*? What else was he supposed to call them? They began digging at the piles of stone at the bottom of the floor as fast as they could while air already started to become scarce in their lungs.

Gods would they have enough time?

No, fuck the Gods.

Mum, we need more time. Please help us.

I'm not ready to die yet.

It had been a long time since Wilbur had called upon his mother's blessing for anything. But the hour of his death seemed as good a time as any.

He looked at Tommy, whose effort at pulling away the stones was still as fierce as his own. He was determined. His eyes were growing cloudy and his movements were becoming uncoordinated but he could still see a strength that he was losing with each passing moment as his lungs burned.

He was determined to live.

And then...

Wilbur pulled against a specific stone and all of a sudden the rocks collapsed in upon themselves, sending both him and Tommy tumbling out of the mineshaft. Stray rocks beat against them along with a flood of water as the two hit the swiftly moving river.

Wilbur tried to grab at Tommy's wrist as they fell. Tommy attempted to weakly grasp at his hand, but the current was too quick and his fingers slipped, losing the boy in the water. His head swam

from the lack of oxygen and he pushed himself to the surface until his head broke through the crashing waves.

He briefly saw a flash of blurry pink but as soon as he caught his breath he was back beneath the river searching for a fading glow and the gleam of golden blonde hair.

One thought echoed through his mind that Wilbur wished desperately didn't matter to him. He didn't know this kid. He shouldn't care this much for him.

But the thought echoed all the same.

He can't swim. Save him.

Wilbur's head broke through the surface again and he screamed, utterly terrified against his best wishes. "He's not resurfacing! Help me!"

He didn't turn, he simply hoped that the flash of pink he'd seen had been his twin.

Wil paddled against the stream, his eyes opened wide in the murky water as he searched for the boy. At some point, he saw his twin catch up to him at his side, and the hope that they'd come across the boy skyrocketed.

As they swam further down the stream, a flash of gold and blue caught his eye. He tapped his brother as they swam side by side, pointing to it. Some fabric suddenly hit him as he swam further down the stream and Wilbur scrambled to grab it. He looked down beneath the waves and saw Tommy's red scarf clenched tightly in his fist.

By then Techno had shot forward with a speed Wilbur would never be able to match, spotting the kid in the water.

He wasn't moving.

Finally, he saw Techno surface and he broke through the icy water with him. He swayed from the lack of oxygen as his vision focused with water-stained glasses at the sight of his brother carrying a limp and lifeless Tommy in his arms.

His face was pale and had a blue hue to it, his arms hung uselessly in Techno's grasp. His straw blonde hair fell over his eyes.

Wilbur's grip on the scarf tightened.

It had been four minutes since the moment he and Tommy had fallen from the mineshaft. He'd not seen Tommy resurface once.

He felt something tight swell in his throat.

I don't know him. He means nothing! If he dies, what should I care?

You told him about Theseus. You let down your walls. You protected him. He's a child and a kind one at that. A spitfire of wit and perseverance. He's a good kid. And I'd be sad if he died today.

He meant something. Less than an enemy but not quite a friend. A...accomplice or an acquaintance and a young one at that. Whether Wilbur wanted to admit it or not. He liked the kid and he didn't want to see him dead.

He was so young. As young as Theseus might have been today if he'd survived. He'd be damned if he let the kid fall to a watery grave.

The sounds of screams are what woke him that night.

He jolted upright in his chair nearly sending his son tumbling off him from where the boy had been sleeping on his chest.

Schlatt quickly caught Tubbo and scooped him into his arms as the screams from outside the room continued.

He eyed Philza's desk and looked down at his son who was whimpering with fear. He set the boy on the ground and smoothed out his tousled hair as he spoke, "Go get under Phil's desk, Tubbo. And whatever you do. Don't move from that spot until I come to get you. No matter what you hear, do not move from that spot."

"But—" Tubbo began but Schlatt cut him off.

"No buts, you stay under the table and don't leave until I come to get you, okay?"

Tubbo's eyes filled with tears. "Dad, I'm scared."

Schlatt felt part of his heart shatter at his son's frightened voice. He hugged the boy as tightly as he could, "It's gonna be alright, buddy. I won't let anyone hurt you but you need to hide, alright?"

Tubbo nodded and Schlatt pressed a kiss on the top of his head, "I love you, kiddo."

"I love you too, Dad."

With that, the five-year-old crawled underneath Phil's desk and out of sight. Schlatt let out a sigh of relief and quickly ran out of the room to the sound of Wilbur and Theseus screaming.

The moment he entered the hallway and looked at the princes' rooms he felt his blood run cold at what he saw.

The emperor was lying just outside the door in a pool of his own blood.

“Phil!” Schlatt cried and rushed over to his best friend. Before he could even kneel by his emperor’s side he looked up to the twins’ open door and froze as he saw a masked man look back at him from the balcony.

“Oh fuck...” The ram paled.

He broke into a run as soon as he saw what the man was holding. It was the youngest prince and his son’s best friend.

“Schlatt!” Theseus cried, reaching out a tiny hand to him. The chancellor leaped over what he prayed was not Technoblade’s body and through the balcony doors.

“Let him go you fucking prick!”

He had almost reached the boy and his captor when another man appeared out of nowhere with a loaded crossbow in hand. The arrow from the crossbow fired and buried deeply into Schlatt’s shoulder, sending him reeling back into the wall.

This didn’t stop him however from frantically trying to reach Theseus as he jumped up from the wall and lunged for the masked man.

“Stubborn bitch aren’t you?” The brunette captor with white goggles sneered before hitting Schlatt in his jaw with the brunt of the crossbow knocking him out.

It was maybe a minute or two before Schlatt stirred himself back to life, refusing to let the bastards get away with Theseus. But by the time he was able to shakily steady himself upright, the men had disappeared.

And Theseus along with them.

And then the...

And then...

And then there was a knock at the door of his office that Schlatt blurrily lifted his head up to, stirring from his nightmarish slumber.

He was dreaming of that night again.

He had to admit, he'd truly thought he'd banished the memory of the night from his mind. But it seemed the guilt had come back to haunt him once more.

"Come in," He rasped, his head pounding from what he knew would be a nasty hangover later on.

A headful of strawberry blonde hair peered in, his glasses nearly catching on the door frame, and Schlatt tilted his head at the sight of Quackity's ward.

"What are you doing here, little slime?"

The boy shuffled inside and closed the door behind him. He wrung his hands nervously for a moment, looking away before he spoke.

"Quackity wants to know if you have any news on Prince Wilbur. He's very worried. He would've come himself but he knows you won't kick me out and he doesn't want anyone to know he worries. I don't know why he hides that he worries. I think you should always show up when you're worried." Charlie rambled with a grin.

Schlatt chuckled at the boy's rushed words and the way he was rocking himself comfortably on the balls of his feet. "Quackity is a smart man. *Too smart if you ask me.* But he also has a tight grip on his emotions so he doesn't tend to openly share them. Regardless, I understand his concern."

"He was born a commoner, like me. We both had to struggle to stay alive which meant we couldn't afford to be weak."

“Did he tell you that?” Schlatt asked, eyeing the boy as he walked to his desk confidently. He crossed his arms on the table and sat his chin atop them. The boy nodded, “He also told me you were the smartest man in L’manburg. He also said once that Prince Wilbur is smart too.”

“And who do you think taught Wilbur what he knows? The boy was made to be cunning and sharp as a knife. And that’s why he’ll make a great Emperor one day, hopefully long from now. But I was the one who taught him to use his mind the way his brother wields his sword. Both the blade and the brain are powerful weapons.” Schlatt reclined in his chair. “Tell me, boy. How old are you?”

“I’m eight.”

“And how old were you when you first came to Quackity?”

Charlie's face scrunched up in thought. “I think I was five or six, I don’t remember.”

“And what have you learned in the years you’ve been here?”

Charlie looked down at the desk for a long moment. His intense green eyes were focused on a portrait of Tubbo and himself on his desktop.

Something burned in his expression and for once, Schlatt couldn’t get a good read on the child. He had no idea what was going through his mind.

Finally, he spoke.

“Before I came here, I was nothing but a street urchin. I had nothing. No mom or dad. Just another orphan littering the streets,” Charlie explained with a mildly disturbing lack of emotion. Then his face lit up. “And then Quackity found me. He taught me what it meant to be human. He taught me to trust others. He taught me what it meant to live instead of surviving and how to be a kid again.”

Suddenly Charlie raised his head and Schlatt could see the same sharpness he’d taught Wilbur and Tubbo in his eyes. “Most people think I’m slow. But Quackity says they’re wrong. He says my

greatest skill is my ability to listen. To gather information on people. To learn. To hear what people say without sparing me a second glance.”

“I may be a child but I know a lot, Chancellor.” Suddenly his eyes hardened. “A lot more than most would believe for someone as small as me.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it. You seem plenty smart to me. Now you asked about Wilbur?” The blonde nodded and Schlatt sighed. “I have nothing for Quackity as of yet but tell him when we find the twins, after the king he’ll be the second to know.”

“Thank you, sir,” The boy said, his energy deflating a bit at the lack of news.

Schlatt shook his head, “Please, you can call me Schlatt. Your wit has earned you that.”

The child grinned and then his face fell once more as he lamented, “I hope we find Tubbo soon. He’s always been kind to me and now so have you.”

Charlie opened the door and called out cheerfully, as was his nature, “Goodbye, Schlatt.” The door closed and Schlatt let out the first genuine smile since Tubbo’s disappearance.

“Goodbye, Charlie.”

“Is he breathing?!” Wilbur panicked as he and his brother fished Tommy from the river and set him onto the grass, his lips a terrifying shade of blue.

“He will if I have anything to do with it,” Techno said, grasping his wrist. He felt for the pulse there for a long moment then paled, his eyes fearful.

Crow flew to Wilbur’s shoulder as his twin began pushing harshly against the boy’s chest in a steady manner. She buried her beak into his curly hair and Wil didn’t blame her. For the first time,

he felt completely natural with her on his shoulder.

Wilbur recognized this technique, he'd seen Bad and Skeppy do it several times on other patients.

He knew what it meant though.

It meant he hadn't been quick enough. It meant his heart had probably stopped. Which meant...

Tommy was essentially dead. And it was his fault.

He'd killed him.

He'd killed him.

He'd killed Tommy.

No, not yet. He's not dead yet. He can't be.

"C'mon glow boy, wake up. You have a shit ton of explaining to do. I said I'd take you to the lights, and I damn well meant it." Wilbur said, grasping his hand. "Nobody should be able to do what you can do so prove it. *Breathe*. Right now. Show Techno and me just how much of a glowstick you are right now."

"How much of a *what*?"

"His words, not mine! Just keep pushing!" Wilbur exclaimed, his voice frantic. And then...

Something strange or in Wilbur's case, *miraculous*, happened.

Wilbur and Technoblade watched in pure confusion and amazement (though Techno never stopped doing compressions) as Tommy's hair turned into a silvery white for perhaps a minute before fading back to a golden blonde.

The two stared at the boy in shock for a solid minute before eventually, Techno peered up at his twin.

"Glowing, you said?" Techno asked and Wilbur nodded in astonishment. And then Tommy took a deep inhale, his eyes fluttering a bit before scrunching up in discomfort.

The boy sucked in another pained gasp and Wilbur could almost feel the burn within his lungs. Techno pulled away and let out a long sigh of relief.

"Tommy?" Wilbur rasped, gently holding the boy's shoulder as he swam back to consciousness. And then Tommy turned himself over to expel the river water from his lungs. Wilbur watched as his twin hesitantly set his hand on the teen's back, patting it gently as Tommy gagged.

"Easy, kid. Easy. Get it all out," Techno soothed in a surprisingly gentle tone that Wilbur didn't hear all that often. The teen retched for another minute or two as he cleared his lungs until finally, his coughing subsided.

As soon as it was over, Tommy crumpled to the ground, wincing as he wrapped his arms gently around himself. Wilbur tried to kneel closer to him but the boy held up a hand and croaked, "Hold on, just give me a second, and please don't freak out."

Wilbur nodded and chuckled weakly. "I doubt there's anything that would surprise me at this point."

The teen snorted and then winced as he gritted out. "*Yeah, you'd think that.*"

The moment the words left him he started to glow again, and Wilbur watched Techno's eyes widen in disbelief. Instead of his hands, this time Wilbur could see his ribcage glowing through his sweater.

“Oh.” He mouthed, his jaw going slack. Something about the way Tommy was holding his chest caught his eye. He was cradling spots where his ribs had cracked from Technoblade trying to revive him. If he looked close enough he could actually see exactly where his ribs had broken. The thought sent a shudder up the man’s spine.

Tommy’s hand pressed down more firmly against the spots and his hand began to glow as well. After a few moments, he moved it to another crack, and so on.

Wilbur looked back to where Tommy’s hand had first been placed and another sound of disbelief jumped in his throat as he watched Tommy’s ribs cinch themselves back together. The bones seemed to move on their own, slotting themselves back into place until there was no way to tell he’d ever been injured in the first place.

“Did you just...” Techno trailed off and then sucked in a breath when the glow faded away and Tommy choked out a wheeze. The teen lolled his head to the side to lazily look at Wilbur.

“Surprised yet?” Tommy slurred and Wilbur let out a startled chuckle and unconsciously brushed the still-sopping wet hair out of Tommy’s eyes.

“Very much so, uhm... yeah that’s pretty weird, kid...not to mention *impossible*.” Wilbur turned to his brother and smiled humorously at the expression of pure bafflement on his face. “Techno, if you keep staring, your eyes are going to burn a hole through the kid.”

Techno’s gaze shot up and he sputtered, “Are you not the least bit perturbed by any of this?!”

“Tech, I almost drowned like ten minutes ago. I’m almost a hundred percent positive I’m in shock. Give me another hour and then ask me.” Wilbur grinned.

He gently helped the teen into a sitting position, letting him lean up against his side, and then asked the only thing he could think of at that moment.

“Are you okay?”

Tommy laughed a bit loopily and replied, “I’m alive.” It sounded more like a question than a statement. He then turned around to look at Wilbur and asked, “We’re alive?”

“We are in fact, *alive*, surprisingly.” Wilbur smiled down at him.

Tommy let his head tilt to the side as he looked around at the forest and the river surrounding them. “*Holy shit, we’re alive.*”

Ok, so he’s also in shock.

“Are we seriously just going to gloss over the fact that you *glow*?!” Techno exclaimed, his brow furrowing in confusion.

“I’m a super pog magic boy. That’s all the explanation I need to give for now.” Tommy said firmly before slumping back against Wilbur, relishing in the brief comfort.

The teen looked up at Wilbur and then frowned when he noticed that blood was still trailing down his head.

“I can fix that.” He said bluntly.

Wilbur eyed him curiously for a moment before shaking his head. “Let’s get warm first before we worry about that. We almost died once today, I’d rather not let hypothermia get us now.” As if on cue Tommy shivered.

Finally, Technoblade stirred himself out of whatever dazed state he’d been in and swallowed. “We can make a fire near the river bank. It’ll be dark soon anyway and I’d rather us not travel too deeply into the woods.”

“Thank gods. My back is killing me.” Wilbur said absently. Tommy quirked his head in confusion at that, but then assumed he probably was referring to the way they’d slammed into the wall back at the cave.

“No...” Schlatt murmured his body tilting over the edge of the balcony dangerously as he cried out in pain.

“Schlatt!” A voice called out from behind and the brunette turned to see the Queen at the room's threshold with Philza's body lying in her arms.

“Your Majesty...?” Jschlatt croaked, dizzy from blood loss due to the wound in his shoulder. Kristin looked back at him with a pale expression and Schlatt's heart sank, “Is he...?”

“Not for long. I promise.” Kristin said then she looked down at the unmoving forms of her boys and asked tearfully, “Tell me they're alive, Schlatt...”

Schlatt broke off the end of the arrow buried in his shoulder, leaving the other half in to clot the bleeding, and then kneeled by the unmoving form of Prince Technoblade. He picked up the pink-haired boy in his arms, ignoring the pain in his shoulder and listening for the steady sound of his breath.

He breathed out a sigh of relief when the boy's chest rose and fell at a steady pace. He hoisted the unconscious boy into his good arm and moved onto Wilbur who was slumped against the wall between his bed and Techno's.

He looked over the boy for a moment before noticing the hitched but still stable sound of Wilbur breathing. He set Techno down at Wilbur's side and turned to the Queen.

“They're alive,” Schlatt said and knelt by Philza, his heart catching in his throat at the sight of the wound in his king's stomach.

Phil wasn't breathing.

“Oh, gods...” Schlatt trembled and grabbed one of Phil's hands. There wasn't a pulse.

"Come on, brother, don't do this. Don't do this, your boys need you now more than ever." His voice shook violently as he tried to hold back his emotions.

Suddenly Kristin grabbed his arm and Schlatt looked up at the saddest look he'd ever seen in her eyes. She swallowed then spoke, "I need you to do something for me, Jschlatt."

The chancellor nodded, too afraid his voice would break if he spoke.

"Take care of them, Schlatt." Kristin whispered, "I can save him...but I won't be able to come back."

"What?" Schlatt gasped and turned to look back at the twins who were unconsciously clinging to one another, "But..."

"I was only ever meant to save them...nobody else." Kristin shook her head tearfully. Her hand gripped tighter as her resolve solidified, "Tell Phil...when he wakes up, that I love him, that I love our sons, that I'll do everything in my power to bring Theseus back. And that I'm sorry."

Schlatt shook his head, "Sorry for what?"

Kristin turned away and said something Schlatt would take with him to his grave. "I knew what would happen. I've always known. But I can't let him die, Schlatt. I can't." Schlatt's expression went blank as the words sunk in.

She knew that Theseus was going to be taken. That Phil was going to...

She knew.

And she did...nothing.

He jerked his arm away, repulsed.

“And you...you didn’t tell him? All these years...and you didn’t say a goddamn word?!”

“How do you tell someone that their child was doomed to a fate worse than death long before they were born?” Kristin pleaded, tears streaming down her face. “By saving Phil...I’ll change things. I’ll give my son a fighting chance. A chance to make his own destiny. I couldn’t tell him and neither can you. For Theseus’ sake.” Kristin placed a hand on the gaping hole in Phil’s stomach. “Promise me, Jschlatt. For my sons. For your son. For the Kingdom. For Phil.”

And while every atom in his body wanted to rage at the cruel world, Schlatt merely nodded his head and turned his face away. The words left his lips like burning wax dripping onto dry parchment.

“I promise. But not for you. For Phil.”

He squeezed his eyes shut as he saw a blindingly golden light flash behind his eyelids.

And then it was gone. And so was the Empress.

Schlatt jarred awake, nearly falling from his chair as the nightmare—*memory*—coiled like a snake around his heart. He turned his chair and put his head in his hands, letting his elbows rest on his thighs as he caught his breath.

“Fuck...” The ram muttered and then wiped away the dampness from his cheeks.

Why? Why now? Why was he reliving this now?

Could the universe just cut him a goddamn break?

Suddenly there was a knock at his door and Phil's voice rang through from the other side. "Can I come in?"

Apparently not.

The chancellor stumbled to his feet and to the doorway, opening it for the Emperor.

"Your Majesty," He said half-heartedly, not looking up at the man in the eye as he rounded his desk.

"None of that shit tonight." Phil retorted, exhaustion and exasperation written across his face as he pulled up a chair in front of Schlatt's desk.

Schlatt nodded and handed the man a glass, "Very well...*Phil.*"

"Have you been sulking in here all afternoon?"

The ram snorted as he pulled a bottle of rum from his cabinet, "Among other things. Mostly I've been trying to sleep."

"Sorry, did I wake you?" Phil leaned back in his chair, pouring himself a glass. Schlatt shook his head as he sat back down and made himself his own drink.

"No, I woke myself up." The chancellor was sure he looked as beaten down as Phil did. The blonde turned his glass absentmindedly in his hand for a moment before asking, "Bad dream?"

Schlatt's expression glossed over for a moment.

The glow faded and Schlatt peeled open his eyes, looking around and then down at Phil.

The hole in his abdomen was gone and Schlatt finally let himself breathe when he felt a pulse at Phil's wrist.

The guards around the sector were most likely dead considering no one had come to their aid. So that meant it was up to him to get help.

Schlatt squeezed Phil's hand tight in his own for a moment and lamented sorrowfully, "I couldn't save him, Phil. I'm...goddammit..." Finally, a choked sob tore through Schlatt and he had to take a moment to pull himself together.

"I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I couldn't save him. I'm so sorry..."

With that, Schlatt stood from the ground. His knees nearly buckled as the world around him swayed from blood loss.

It didn't matter if he bled out, he just needed to get to Puffy.

"Yeah, somethin' like that," Schlatt replied, his voice drained of emotion as he took a sip from his drink. Phil looked up at him, his gaze searching. The ram stared back, feeling like an ant beneath a microscope, burning alive under the intense heat of the sun.

"Did you mean it?" Phil asked after a long moment. Schlatt huffed and set down his drink. He didn't see the point in playing dumb.

"I don't...I don't know. No, probably."

Phil nodded and eyed the painting of Tubbo on his desk, thoughtfully.

“You aren’t nothing without him, Schlatt. There’s more to you than just your love for your son, as there is more to me. We are not defined by our children.” Phil assured him. Schlatt’s brow knitted as he rebuked the response.

“I know that.” He hissed and tried to keep his expression steady as the memory flashed again through his mind.

Schlatt staggered through the hallway, taking note of the dead soldiers that littered every entrance. Their necks had either been sliced or an arrow had been shot through their eyes.

A quick death.

A silent one.

An assassin’s work. Two at that.

No. Not an assassin. A kidnapper.

Schlatt gripped the railings tightly as he descended the stairs, hopeful that there would be a guard on the other side to assist him.

He opened the door to the officials’ hallway and stumbled right into the grasp of a knight that Schlatt immediately recognized.

“Ted...” He rasped as the knight held him up, his eyes wide.

“Your Grace! What the hell happ—“

“Sound the alarm. And take me to the Captain. Prince Theseus has been taken. And the Emperor and the princes have been injured.”

Ted nodded and yelled out to one of his fellow men to wake the Warden and the Captain and to sound the bells. He lowered the injured man to the ground and ripped the cape off his own back.

“There’s no time—” Schlatt interjected, gripping his wrist.

Ted shook his head, “I’m not going to leave little Tubbo without a father tonight, Schlatt. Now hold still, this isn’t going to be pleasant.”

Ted reached down to Schlatt’s belt and fished out the flask of whiskey he had been so confident he’d find.

“For once, your love for alcohol has saved your life,” Ted said with a smile and then pulled out the rest of the arrow before Schlatt could answer.

Schlatt bit into his cheek harshly as he suppressed his pain and the skin gave way when he felt the sharp sting of alcohol poured into his wound. This time he could not contain the groan that slipped from his mouth.

“I hate you, you know that?” Schlatt hissed, clutching onto the man’s arm. Ted grinned as he tore strips of fabric from his cloak and began winding it around his shoulder.

“Don’t lie, Your Grace. We all know I’m your favorite knight.”

“Maybe, but I still hate you the most.”

“You should be thankful! I could’ve let Puffy fix you up and she’s a lot less gentle than I.”

“Well aren’t I the lucky one.”

“Nobody is lucky this night, Schlatt,” Ted said mournfully and the Chancellor nodded and let his head thud back against the floor. “Yeah, no fucking kidding.”

Suddenly one of the doors slammed open and Schlatt turned to see Puffy staring at him with wide eyes, "Schlatt..."

The man shook his head and gestured to the door, "Fret over me later. You need to start searching for Theseus, they took him. Two men. One with brown hair and white goggles, the other a dark blonde-haired man cloaked in a green hood and a white mask with a smile. Let the guards get Phil and the twins to Bad."

"And Tubbo?" Puffy asked, reaching his side, her hand tightly clasped around his.

"He's fine. He was with me when I heard their screams. I'll get him from his hiding spot myself. He will only come out if he hears me."

"And you? Are you alright?" Puffy asked and Schlatt's voice caught in his throat.

"I wasn't fast enough. I saw him. He reached out for me and called my name and I couldn't reach him..."

Puffy gripped his hand tighter. "You were outnumbered. It's not your fault. I should've..."

"You'll drive yourself mad if you start with that shit," Schlatt interjected and the sheep rolled her eyes.

"Says you."

Schlatt snorted and offered Puffy his good arm, letting the woman pull him to his feet. He swayed unsteadily for a moment before Puffy lent him her shoulder.

Her eyes turned up to Ted and she gave the man a soft smile, "Thank you, Ted, for saving my brother."

If Schlatt had been a softer man, he would've cried at the words.

"His Grace is too fucking stubborn to die in my arms," Ted laughed and then nodded. His eyes turned down and he gave her a soft smile. "I'll keep an eye on your little one, Captain. Now please, save Theseus. For the Emperor's sake. And for the sake of the Empire."

"Puffy will find them," Phil assured, though it sounded like he was mostly trying to assure himself. Schlatt jolted a bit as he cleared his head.

"*You don't know that,*" Schlatt argued. "Where was this talk this morning? Where was this unwavering confidence when you practically threw Puffy out of your office?"

Phil simmered, his wings ruffling behind him as he retorted, "I realized she was right. I can't afford to stay negative and neither can you. We have a job to do and I'll go crazy if I keep moping around like this...so will you."

"What do you want from me, Phil? Do you want me to go back to work and pretend everything is fine? Pretend our sons aren't missing? Pretend Theseus's birthday isn't right around the corner?" Schlatt growled and felt the glass in his hand chip a bit at the hold he had on it.

Phil's face was blank as he bluntly responded. "Yes."

Schlatt set down the glass, watching as the alcohol sloshed back and forth before finally stilling to a halt. He looked to Phil whose expression was as grave as his own. Finally, he nodded.

"Okay, then. Let's get back to work."

There was a knock at the door and Tubbo shoved a hand over his mouth as he pushed himself further into the corner of Phil's desk, trying to scrunch himself up as small as he possibly could.

He tried his best to stifle the sob spilling from his mouth. And then felt his heart drop to his stomach when he heard the door creak open.

“I don’t want to die.” The five-year-old thought as he sucked in a silent breath as footsteps entered the room.

“Tubbo?” His father’s voice called but Tubbo shook his head and buried his face into his knees.

Liar.

Liar.

Liar.

It’s not him.

It’s a trick.

The monster is coming to get me.

“Kid, come on out. It’s me, Tubs. It’s Dad.”

“I don’t believe you.” Tubbo’s voice shook as he spoke. What was the point of hiding? The monster was going to find him anyway.

He whimpered as he heard the imposter take a seat beside the desk, just barely out of sight.

“I know you’re scared, kid. But I promise it’s me. I’m right here.” The voice soothed and Tubbo placed his small hands over his ears and shut his eyes tightly.

He could feel the imposter moving again and then there was a gentle hand grasping one of his. Tubbo screeched, "Don't touch me! Leave me alone!"

The hand receded instantly and the voice sighed, "What can I do to prove it's me, Tubbo?"

Tubbo let the hands at his ears slide down a bit but kept his eyes shut tight as he spoke, "What's my favorite color?"

The voice let out a weak laugh but still responded gently, "You have several, do you want me to name them all?"

Tubbo nodded.

"Blue, pink, and yellow. All in that order."

"Ok, that was an easy one. You still could be the monster." Tubbo argued. "Alright, ask me another question, then."

Tubbo thought hard for a long moment, his tear-stained cheeks scrunching up in concentration. "Um...where do I want to go most in the whole world?"

"You want me to take you to see the ocean? You said you wanted to see if water could really be salty."

"It doesn't make sense for it to be salty! All the other water isn't salty! Why is the ocean?" And then the realization hit him. The only person he'd told that to had been... Tubbo opened his eyes.

"Dad?"

"I'm right here, Tubbo. I came back to get you, just like I said I would."

"Is the monster gone?" The child's voice shook and he saw his father stretch out his arms for him to run into.

"Yes, Tubbo." His father's voice was tearful, and Tubbo sobbed as he barreled himself into his chest.

Schlatt's arms wrapped tightly around him and he felt one hand card gently through his hair. "Dad..." Tubbo cried as he buried his face into his shirt.

"You were so brave. So so brave. I'm so proud of you. It's over, buddy." Schlatt consoled and then carefully pulled the boy back, holding his face in his hands. "I'm here. I promise I'll never let anyone take you from me. I'll never let anyone hurt you. I promise. Never."

Tubbo realized at that moment that this was the first time he'd ever seen his father cry. And it terrified him almost as much as the sounds he'd been hearing from beneath the desk.

"I was scared, dad. I thought the monster had gotten you." Then his gaze trailed to where his father's shoulder had been bandaged and his eyes widened, "It did get you!"

"It did. But I'm still here. And you did so well, kid." Schlatt said, brushing the boy's bangs out of his eyes.

The child nodded and pushed himself back into the ram's arms once more. This time wrapping his arms around his father's neck so he could bury his face into his shoulder.

"I thought I was going to be alone. I don't want to be alone." Tubbo whimpered and Schlatt hugged the boy tighter.

"I won't ever leave you. You're stuck with me forever. Sorry." Schlatt laughed, pulling a small giggle from the still-shaking child.

“If I’m stuck with you, then you’re also stuck with me.”

Schlatt felt the boy’s words tug at his heartstrings, and he felt a moment of peace in the eye of a raging storm. He knew it wouldn’t last, he knew the brief happiness on his son’s face would crumple into dust soon. He knew he’d have to tell him what happened to his best friend.

But that was the future. For now, in this moment, he felt relief like no other at the steady rhythm of his son’s heart and the even pace of his breath.

Tubbo was safe and sound in his arms.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way, kid.”

“Come on, Ossium.” The brunette gently pet the horse’s bony frame as he walked next to him, allowing the steed a rest while they trailed at the edge of the forest. The sun was beginning to dip beneath the horizon for the night.

He’d need to make camp soon.

They had made it through the kingdom without too much of a fuss. They’d dodged a few guards here and there, but the dark blue hood he had pulled over his horns kept him mostly hidden from anyone who might recognize him.

Now he just had to keep himself from getting mugged or stabbed.

Easy.

He wasn’t weak, despite popular belief. Tubbo tended to use his small stature to his advantage in convincing others he wasn’t a threat. Even to Ranboo. Tubbo was an alchemist. An inventor.

And a damn good one. Not all of his contraptions were peaceful. His brush with death when he was a child had given him quite the perspective on how dangerous people could be.

So he'd learned from it.

Gunpowder. A fine, surprisingly sticky powder that had blown off half his face. So what did Tubbo do with it?

He'd taken the very thing that had nearly killed him and turned it into a weapon. A fine contraption made of wood and metal that used gunpowder as a charge to fire small chunks of metal at a target.

Or as Tubbo referred to it. *A gun.*

He turned his invention around in his hand thoughtfully for a moment and looked back to the castle that was slowly getting further and further away. The brunette sighed as guilt prickled at him, "I'm sorry, Dad. Sorry, Ranboo. I'll be home soon."

He turned back to the open woods ahead, following whatever direction Ossium took him in all while scanning the area around him for any sign of the princes.

Suddenly, the hair on the back of his neck rose and his ear twitched at the sound of poorly concealed footsteps trailing him.

Tubbo grinned, a tad maliciously, as he stopped dead in his tracks, waiting for the person behind him to make a move.

"Say, that's a mighty fine horse you have there, lad."

Tubbo swiftly concealed his weapon from sight as he turned to face whatever idiot was trying to mug him for his horse.

The brunette plastered an innocent smile to his face and said cheerfully to the man who was clearly hiding a knife in his offhand, “Thank you, sir. Raised little Boner all by myself, I did. He’s quite the steed. He’s gotten my family through some tough times.”

“What kind of name is Boner?” The man sneered immediately dropping the nice-guy act and Tubbo smirked, “What kind of idiot brings a knife to a gunfight?”

“A *what* fight?” The stranger finally took out his weapon, and pointed it at the teen. Tubbo didn’t flinch as he threatened, “Hand over the horse, kid. I won’t ask twice.”

At that, Tubbo unholstered his gun and *laughed* as he aimed the barrel right in the middle of the man’s forehead. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

“What the fuck is that thing?” The man’s eyes widened and Tubbo felt a rush of adrenaline at the flicker of fear in his eyes.

“Do you know what a firework is?” Tubbo asked, clicking the safety off.

“Of course, I fucking do, you brat. Now give me the damn horse before I gut you.” He snarled, taking another step closer.

“*Oho!* No need to get all worked up! How about instead of the horse, I blow off your fucking head? I’m sure your brains would make a nice addition to the scenery.”

“You’re fucking crazy, kid. Now I won’t ask again—” And then the man gasped as a knife whizzed through the air and entered his back. The stranger’s eyes rolled back and he fell to the ground. Tubbo scoffed, slightly annoyed, but clicked the safety back on for another fight.

He looked up at who had interrupted him and paled. Ranboo was sitting atop Carl with a terrifying glare as he slotted one of his throwing knives back into place.

“Oh...hey Ran. I see you’ve met my friend.” Tubbo winced as he gestured to the man who was still twitching on the ground drowning in his own blood.

“Quite the companion, real violent-type.” Ranboo dead-panned as he jumped off from Carl, making his way over to him.

Tubbo stumbled back and raised his hands, “I know what it looks like but listen Ranboo, I—”

Ranboo stepped over the man who’d tried to attack him, nearly kicking as he drew closer. He looked fucking *pissed*. Tubbo panicked, “Look! I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to scare you! I—”

And then he was being pulled into a bone-crushing hug and all the fear vanished at the warmth of his friend. Tubbo melted into the hug and Ranboo let out a sigh, “You’re an idiot.”

“Sorry,” Tubbo mumbled into his chest. Ranboo pulled back and looked him over for any injuries. Tubbo chuckled, “I’m fine, Boo. Not a scratch on me.”

Ranboo grabbed his shoulders, slightly shaking him as he spoke, “You are the most stubborn man I’ve ever had the displeasure of knowing. You scared the hell out of me.”

“I had it sorted.”

“I’m sure you did,” Ranboo replied, entirely genuine. “But what kind of friend would I be if I didn’t worry?”

Tubbo shook his head, “I couldn’t sit around and do nothing. I had to go after them.”

“I know but I just...” Ranboo trailed off, dropping his head for a moment, “We’re a package deal. Where you go, I go. You can’t get rid of me that easily.”

Tubbo’s eyes sparkled with excitement, “So you’ll help me?”

“I’m here, aren’t I?” Ranboo relented, his eyes fond.

The brunette beamed and hugged him once more. “Thank you, Ran. I owe you for this.”

“Damn right.”

Chapter End Notes

"What do you have there?"

"A GUN."

"NO."

Beeduo is so BAMF in this fic.

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

Brother Knows Best

Chapter Notes

teeheee its time

TW: Panic Attacks; Gaslighting; Gore

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @soulswimmr (@arbitersart)<3
<https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

Word Count: 6,800

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Wilbur, I swear to fucking god if you do not *hold still*—” Tommy griped as he tried to clean the wound before he attempted to heal it. He had to make sure there was nothing in it that would heal over. He knew from experience that not cleaning a wound properly could lead to a nasty infection.

“It *hurts*. ” Wilbur hissed, wincing when Tommy dabbed the wet cloth in his hand at it once more. “You’re such an infant,” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. Wilbur scoffed.

“Says the *actual* child.”

“At least I’m not the one crying over a scrape.”

Suddenly Techno’s voice cut in as he appeared from the woods with more firewood in his arms. “As much as I’d *love* to hear you two bicker like a bunch of toddlers...” He trailed off for a moment and then retorted, “Actually, you know what? I don’t love it. *Shut the fuck up.*”

Tommy chuckled and grabbed a few branches from Techno’s pile and placed them into the fire. Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted Crow lounging once again in Techno’s woolen hood.

“I’m starting to think she likes you more than me.”

“Must be my colorful personality,” Techno snarked and turned his head to see the bird perk up at him. Crow gently nuzzled the man’s cheek with her head and Tommy gasped dramatically.

“I feel so betrayed right now.”

Techno laughed, “I propose a trade, kid. You take Wilbur and I’ll take the bird.” Tommy wrinkled his nose at that. “I think I’d rather drown again.”

Suddenly a pinecone was being chucked at him as Wilbur grumbled. “*Rude.*”

Tommy stuck his tongue out at him. He then stood from the small fire and walked back over to Wilbur who visibly tensed at the cloth in his hand.

“Hold still or I’ll set Crow loose on you,” Tommy threatened, only half joking.

Wilbur frowned. “Why is everyone ragging on me tonight?”

“You have a very insultable face.” Tommy grinned and quickly took the opportunity to clean the rest of the wound. After another once over he took a step back and asked, “Ready to see my party trick?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be I guess. I’m not gonna grow a sixth finger or another head right?”

“No, it’s perfectly safe. Never had any issues with any extra limbs but there’s a first time for everything I suppose.” Tommy said deviously.

Wilbur growled, “You are an evil child.”

“I’m not a child. I’m a big man. Now hush.” Tommy turned to Techno and asked, “You want to come and see, Techno?”

Techno nodded and stood from the fallen tree he'd been sitting on. He walked over and sat on the ground facing Wilbur and Tommy by the fire. As soon as he'd settled, Tommy nodded shakily and pushed up his sleeves once more, suddenly feeling unusually nervous.

He felt Crow hop to his shoulder and he took a deep breath before turning back to Wilbur. Tommy gently held up his hand but before he pressed it to the wound he hesitated and said, "Just don't... don't freak out."

Wilbur's eyes softened and he nodded. Tommy turned to Techno who eyed his twin for a moment before nodding as well. The blonde exhaled and shut his eyes allowing the magic to trail down his arm into his hand once more, lighting it up. He pressed his fingers to the side of Wilbur's temple and waited.

He heard Techno let out a soft gasp and Tommy carefully pried open his eyes to examine his expression. Tommy felt relief flood through him when instead of fear, he found fascination written across the man's face.

The last of the wound closed up and Tommy was about to pull away when Wilbur suddenly grabbed Tommy's injured wrist, gently. He shot the man a confused look until Wilbur grabbed his other hand which was still glowing and carefully placed it atop his injured wrist. Tommy stiffened but didn't pull away and neither did Wilbur.

The teen stared at the injury and felt something tight well up in his throat as the bruise that Dream had given him faded from sight. He could feel Wilbur analyzing his expression but if he saw anything, the man didn't comment on it.

Instead, he simply released Tommy as soon as the bruise was gone.

Tommy looked down at his wrist as if it was suddenly foreign to him. He tried to recall if Dream had ever made him heal himself. A couple of memories surfaced but all of them were unpleasant and spiteful.

What Wilbur had done was neither. He hadn't even forced him to do it. Tommy could've pulled away at any moment. In fact, why did Wilbur care if his wrist was healed in the first place? It's not like it was hurting the brunette, *it was on his arm*.

Why bother?

Tommy didn't understand.

"So..." Techno trailed after a long moment of silence. Tommy looked at him and the man asked, "How long have you been able to do that exactly?"

Tommy let out a laugh, "Quite a long time. It started happening after my parents and sister died."

The twins stiffened at that but Tommy merely shook his head and continued, "I was pretty little so I don't remember them very well. Dream told me people would come after me for my power. That they wanted to use it for themselves."

"What happened to your family if you don't mind me asking?" Wilbur said cautiously.

Tommy frowned. "They were killed by raiders who destroyed my village. My sister...was special like me."

That part was only a half lie. Drista was special, but not for the reasons they think.

"After that, Dream never trusted people again. I was all he had left. That's why he's so protective. That's why...That's why I never left... and..." Tommy trailed off, his eyes sad.

"You never left that tower..." Wilbur finished and Tommy looked up at him.

"And you're still going to go back?" Techno asked.

Tommy turned sharply and said, "No." He bit his lip and huffed. "Yes. *Gah!* I don't know!" Tommy slumped defeatedly against the tree and sighed. "It's complicated."

“Well, you don’t have to if you don’t want to. Nobody deserves to be a prisoner in their own home. Not even necklace thieves.” Wilbur said with a grin and Tommy punched him playfully in the arm.

After a moment of heavy silence, Tommy asked, “So...what’s your tragic backstory? Since we’re sharing and all.”

Wilbur looked at Techno for a moment and the man shrugged. The brunette fiddled with his hands as his brother spoke, “Wilbur and I were born in the Nether. Our birth mother was a piglin and we never knew our birth father. All we know is that he was human.

“Our tribe hated us for being hybrids and so they abandoned us for dead. It was Phil, our father, who saved us. He brought us to the overworld and adopted us.”

“And...your brother?” Tommy asked, unsure and Techno stiffened but Wilbur jumped in before he could react.

“I told him a little when we were trapped in the cave,” Wilbur explained and Techno settled a little but still appeared tense.

“Sorry, I shouldn’t have asked.” Tommy let his head drop. Wilbur shook his head.

“It’s okay. Our brother wasn’t from the Nether. He...uh...” Wilbur trailed off and Tommy raised an eyebrow at the hesitation.

“He was also adopted. Our mother found him one night and brought him home. But he was human. His name was Theseus.”

Theseus.

His name was Theseus?

...

Huh.

That's a cool name.

“That necklace was his,” Techno said a bit bitterly and Tommy nodded shamefully looking down at his feet.

“I’m sorry about that. I never would’ve done that if I’d known.”

Techno stared at him a moment longer before his expression softened and he said, “I believe you. As long as you fulfill your end of the deal then it’s in the past, I suppose.”

“I’m sorry that you lost him. I know I’ve lost a sibling but I never knew Drista well, not that I can remember.”

Wilbur nodded and then gave him a small smile. “He would’ve liked you, I think.”

“What was he like?” Tommy asked, resting his head against the tree, the fire warm and comforting.

To his surprise it was Techno who answered, “Theseus was a little shit, to be blunt. Very devious but always trying his best to make others laugh. He loved to cause trouble though. He knew how to use his age to his advantage to get what he wanted from adults. But he was also very caring and kind. He never hesitated to say exactly what was on his mind and he would’ve talked your ear off if you’d let him.”

“Was he ever annoying?” Tommy asked and Wilbur snorted.

“Every damn day of his life.”

Both Techno and Wilbur's expressions were lost in the past and Tommy smiled. "You don't get to talk about him much, do you?"

"Most people tend to avoid the subject of him like the plague and whenever they do it's always sympathetic or depressing. You're the first person in a long time to actually ask us stuff about him." Techno replied, his face sad.

Tommy's eyes widened in surprise and he sputtered, "Why wouldn't you? Why wouldn't you want to talk about someone you love? Even if they're gone?"

Wilbur piped in at that. "Most people think it will be too painful of a topic for us, which it is, but we'd rather talk about the good times than not at all."

Tommy looked down for a moment and then gave Wilbur a smile, "Then...if you want...you can talk about him to me and I promise I won't get all mooney or cringe."

Techno gave him a small smile and the brunette snorted back a laugh, this time he didn't hesitate when he ruffled the kid's hair. "You're such a weird kid. But, thank you."

The boy smacked away his hands and barked, "You're fucking weird, bitch! I am awesome!"

"While we're on the subject of weird..." Techno cut in on their antics and then turned to Crow who was sleeping on his shoulder. Tommy turned from his slap fight with Wilbur and quirked his head.

Techno cleared his throat and asked, "There isn't anything else magic about you or Crow, right? I mean she isn't going to like, shoot fire from her beak or shapeshift into some weird bird lady?"

Tommy looked at him for an odd moment and then burst out laughing.

"I'm serious! I've seen your bones snap back together. I wouldn't be surprised by anything at this point."

Tommy simply snorted and shook his head, “No Techno, I promise my bird is not actually a person or a fire-breathing dragon. She’s just a crow.”

Wilbur yawned at that and raised up his hands, stretching, “Speaking of crows, my wing is dying right now. I hope you don’t mind, Tommy.”

Something in Tommy’s brain shorted out when he said that.

Your what.

The blonde visibly paled and his eyes went wide as he stammered, “W-What?”

Wilbur straightened up and explained, “Oh, I guess you’ve never seen one before? My brother and I are volantes, we each have a wing. They stay in our backs usually when we’re out but they get a bit cramped if we don’t let them out at night.”

With that, the brunette shook out a startlingly large crow wing with black and blue feathers from his back and Tommy jumped backward in shock. It wasn’t a moment later that Techno followed with a mirror wing with red and black feathers.

Tommy could feel his heartbeat in his ears as all the warnings and lectures he had received from Dream over the years on the danger of wings came bubbling to the surface.

No, no, no. That’s dangerous. You’ll get caught! You’ll get us all caught.

“Tommy?” Wilbur tilted his head, concerned at the boy’s frightened expression. He reached out a hand to him but Tommy flinched away, his breathing spastic.

“Y-you. You... You’re gonna get us all killed. Are you crazy!? You have to hide those!” Tommy’s voice shook violently as he eyed the forest like a hawk, searching for any sign of trappers.

“What do you mean? No one’s out here for miles, Tommy.”

Tommy shook his head and placed his hands in his hair as he bent over trying to calm himself. Instead he stuttered, “Angelhunters. They’ll kill you if they see those. Please. *Please*. You have to hide them. *I don’t want them to hurt you or me. Please.*”

Tommy sank to his knees and shut his eyes tight. He felt two hands against his shoulders and surprised himself when he didn’t flinch away. Instead, he listened to Wilbur’s soft voice.

“Tommy, there are no more Angelhunters. Not around these parts anyway. The Emperor drove them out years ago. You’re safe, we won’t let anything happen to you, okay?”

What?

The blonde couldn’t help himself as he leaned forward into Wilbur’s arms much to the brunette's surprise. Wilbur tensed for a moment before eventually wrapping his arms around the teen.

They’ll catch you, Tommy.

They’ll kill you.

No, Wilbur said they wouldn’t.

Who am I supposed to believe?

Tommy wobbled and felt another hand on his shoulder. He peered up from Wilbur’s arms and saw Techno looking back at him with...

He saw...

Attentiveness? No, perhaps concern? It was as if...

Tommy didn't know how to describe the caution in Techno's crimson eyes, but it radiated a fondness he'd only seen from one other person.

And it wasn't from Dream. It was from Wilbur.

Why.

Why are they looking at me like they care?

Tommy's eyes welled up with tears and he shook his head, "I don't understand. I can't. He said..."

Wilbur stiffened, "Tommy, do you have wings?"

Tommy's heart practically stopped in his chest as an icy fear washed through him. His grip on Wilbur's coat tightened like a vice as he panicked. "No, no, no, no, no. Please, I don't, I swear. I don't have wings. *Please.*"

Wilbur hugged him tighter and spoke gently, "Shh...it's okay, Tommy. You don't have to tell us. I'm sorry I asked. I won't make you say it. But you're safe, I promise."

"I'm sorry." Tommy wept and this time it was Techno who spoke.

"Don't be. You have nothing to be sorry for, kid."

Tommy nodded into Wilbur's chest and something stirred in his mind at the smell of coffee and summer rain in Wilbur's coat. A sense of...familiarity. It made him feel safe.

That...that doesn't make any sense. So Tommy pulled away.

He mourned the comforting arms of Wilbur for a brief moment and then shakily stood to his feet, wrapping his arms around himself. The twins stared back at him with cautious expressions and Tommy felt his face burn with shame. This was the second time today he'd lost it.

They probably thought less of him now for it. Look at this scrawny-ass fifteen-year-old who can't even hold himself together for more than five minutes. *Pitiful.*

Tommy eyed Wilbur's wing and the knot in his stomach only grew. He was terrified. He was so *so* incredibly scared that Wilbur was wrong. That the hunters would find them. That they would slaughter Techno and Wilbur in front of his eyes and go after him next. Or worse, they wouldn't, instead leaving him all alone.

He didn't want to die. And he *definitely* didn't want to be alone anymore.

"Did he lie? Why would he tell me that the...I don't understand. If they've been gone for years, then why?" Tommy's expression was heartbreaking to look at. And the worst part of it all was that Tommy knew this wasn't a question the twins could answer.

It just didn't make any sense! Dream would always come home ranting about the patrols he'd seen searching for avians. On other days he would tell him a sad story of kids he would find lying motionless in an alleyway or the forest. Their faces were pale and grey from blood loss.

But if the Angelhunters have been gone for years...

Then Dream had...

"Tommy...you're shaking," Techno said gently and the blonde simply stared back at him with an empty expression until finally the words registered.

He held up his hands which were trembling involuntarily and frowned. "Oh...sorry...I can't seem to stop."

If there was a reaction to Tommy's odd statement, Techno didn't show it. Instead, he stood to his feet and pressed a hand to his shoulder. "C'mon, kid. Let's get you by the fire. It's time for us to get some sleep, anyway. We have a long day tomorrow."

The boy nodded absently and let himself be led back, all the while his mind was racing with only one thought standing out from the rest of the jumbled cacophony.

Dream had lied.

Little Theseus, you're getting too close.

Do what you have to do.

It'll confuse him even more, Dream. It could even hurt him. His mind could break.

I don't care. Do it.

It's okay if he finds out I lied about the hunters but he can't find out I lied about his past too. Scramble his brains if you have to, just don't let him piece it together, George.

Tommy doesn't deserve this, Dream.

Whose fucking side are you on? We're so close to being done with this. I care about him too but none of this means a damn if he figures out who he is.

Once you've had your fun, let me handle the rest.

“Thank you, [REDACTED]. I’m sure you’ll have the best wings of us all.”

A friendly voice rang in his ears and Tommy’s eyes shot open at the sound. He turned his head expecting to see Wilbur and Technoblade and the forest, but instead, he found himself alone in a room made of gold. It had a high roof, tall archways, and numerous crystal-like windows. It was beautiful.

A golden ballroom.

It was dark and the only light that he could see was the moonlight that shone through the tall windows. Tommy stood to his feet and jolted slightly when he could hear his footsteps echo against the marble floor. He spun slowly as he took in more of his surroundings and then looked upwards to see one large gold chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

Where the hell...

He was dreaming, right? He must be dreaming. There was no way this was real. This place was practically from a storybook.

“Boys! Stay within sight of the [REDACTED], okay? Don’t go wandering too far off!”

A deep, gruff voice echoed faintly in his head and Tommy felt the hair on the back of his neck prickle. He turned and once again, no one was there.

“Hello?!” Tommy called, his heart racing as he stumbled around the empty ballroom. And then froze when the distorted sound of an orchestra echoed muffled through the ballroom. Suddenly someone began to sing.

High in the halls of the kings who are gone.

[REDACTED] *would dance with his ghosts.*

This time a woman's voice danced around in his mind and Tommy scrambled backward, eventually falling back down onto the floor. This wasn't real. *What the fuck is happening?*

The ones' he had lost and the ones he had found.

And the ones who'd loved him the most...

Tommy gasped when a flash of blue shone briefly in front of him and for a moment he could've sworn he'd seen two children dancing. The smaller one was standing on the other's feet.

The ones who'd been gone for so very long.

He couldn't remember their names.

Another flash and this time he saw a man and a woman dancing with one another, neither of which he recognized. In fact, he couldn't see their faces at all. They were shrouded by darkness. Despite this, they looked loving. They looked happy.

They spun him around on the damp old stone.

Spun away all his sorrow and pain.

Tommy screwed his eyes shut. He didn't want to see what the room wanted to show him next. Instead, he growled, "Okay, that's enough of that. Screw this creepy bullshit!"

And he never wanted to leave.

"That's a fucking lie, I want to leave right the fuck now." Tommy hissed at the voice and ignored the sight of two small children running around the room in favor of the door.

"I know what I saw!" This time the voice he heard was small, that of a child. Tommy yanked harshly against the handle of the tall dark oak door but it didn't budge.

"Shit! Let me out!"

Never wanted to leave.

“Shut the hell up!”

And then there was a hand on his shoulder and Tommy screeched. He turned and the ballroom was gone.

Instead, he stood in the remains of a burning town. The smell of burning flesh flooded his nose and suddenly Tommy was wishing he was back in the ballroom again.

There were screams all around him as people ran frantically through the streets while being chased down by people in masks. He even saw one man on fire.

As he woozily walked down the dirt roads that were stained with blood, he saw bodies littering the ground of all different ages, some of them children.

Tommy had to swallow back the nausea that washed over him. He knew what this place was, or at least he thought he did.

Logstedshire.

The wooden town. The hunters chasing people down in the streets. The terrible sight of the dead. Why the only thing missing was...

“Dream, run! Take him and get out of here!” The voice of a girl called and Tommy’s eyes widened. He didn’t recognize the voice but had a pretty good idea of who it belonged to.

Tommy ran through the streets chasing it down. He could almost see the burning house it was coming from when a boy no older than himself crashed into him, sending them both tumbling to the ground.

“Dream!” Someone called and Tommy froze. He lifted his head up and was met with startling green eyes and the tanned freckled face of his older brother. There was a thick gash bleeding freely down his face and his eyes were filled with grief.

Dream barely paid him a second glance as he turned down to search for what he’d dropped in their tumble. He let out a choked cry as he lifted a small child back into his arms from where he’d been thrown.

Tommy’s eyes locked onto the child’s blonde hair and he gasped. *It was him. Till the walls did crumble and fall.*

“Dream, forget him! We have to run!” Tommy turned to see a younger George waving to the boys from up the forest line. His dark brown hair and glasses were still the same, but he was much younger.

Dream turned briefly to look at Tommy and he sucked in a breath at the genuine terror he saw in his older brother’s eyes. Dream cradled his younger self tightly against his chest and darted off, leaving Tommy in the dust.

And he never wanted to leave

Never wanted to leave

Tommy tried to run after him but the scene melted away and he landed face-first on a wooden floor. *For fuck’s sake.*

Tommy lifted up his head and found himself in a hallway of windows that covered one side. It was dark and once again the moonlight was his only guide as he picked himself up off the floor.

He wrapped his arms around himself at the chill in the air and began walking, wondering what horrors were next in store for him.

Wake up. Please someone wake me up.

Please, someone, wake me up.

Never wanted to leave

The hallway seemed to stretch on endlessly and the only sounds he could hear were that of his bare feet thumping against the wood. Tommy ran his hand along the windows as he walked. It was too hazy to see anything out of it other than snow and fog. How the moon still illuminated the room was beyond him.

It was a dream after all. *No...more like a nightmare.*

“Tommy!” A voice further down the hall called and the blonde froze. It wasn’t a voice he recognized. It didn’t really sound like a voice at all. It was much too distorted. Tommy felt a pit in his stomach but pushed through.

The sooner I get my guts ripped out or something, the sooner I can wake up I suppose.

Tommy walked further down the hallway and eventually turned a corner to what looked like another wing of wherever the hell he was. There were four doors and the second one on the left was wide open. And on the ground in front of it was...

Oh.

Oh, shit.

Never wanted to leave

There was someone on the ground lying face down in their own pool of blood. They weren’t moving. Tommy’s legs shook as he walked towards the figure, terror gripping tightly against his heart. The figure had on a white shirt that was stained a dark crimson. Blonde hair covered his face and Tommy could tell the boy was young.

Maybe his age. He didn't know, it was too dark to tell.

He knelt at his side and his voice caught in his throat when he finally noticed where all that blood had been streaming from. There were two large gashes in the boy's back that trailed down to the bone.

Bile rose in his throat again as something else clicked in his brain. He grabbed the body by the shoulder and flipped the kid onto his back.

Tommy screamed.

He scuttered backward away from himself as the hair shifted out of his face, revealing his own blue eyes, hazy and dead.

It was him.

"Oh, gods. Oh fuck. Please wake up. I need to wake up." Tommy hyperventilated while burying his face into his hands. Suddenly the world around him began to shift again, flipping back and forth rapidly between Logstedshire and the hallway.

Tommy looked down at himself again and froze. It was no longer himself on the floor in front of him.

It was...

"Drista, no!" A voice cried out and Tommy was shoved out of the way by Dream. He watched in stunned horror as his brother cradled their sister in his arms, begging for her to wake up.

But Tommy knew she wouldn't. His sister had been dead for a long time.

He looked up from his siblings and sucked in a breath when he saw George, staring back at him with a blank expression.

And then the man smiled.

“It’s time to wake up, Tommy. You have a shadow watching you.”

Tommy shot upright with a gasp, the dream slipping away, already hazy. His heart pounded in his chest and sweat beaded down his brow.

“Oh, my gods. Oh, fuck me.” Tommy whispered into the dark and rested his head against his knees while his heart calmed down. *What the hell had that been?*

It was all just a hazy jumble of images in his brain now. He’d seen Drista and Dream. He’d seen... himself, dead. Then there was the ballroom he’d wandered around. Someone had been speaking to him, but he could no longer remember what had been said.

All he knew was that he’d wanted out of there.

Then, Logstedshire. Where he had been born. He’s seen it razed to the ground in front of his very eyes. He’d seen his sister die. He’d seen Dream running from Logstedshire with him. Was this just some of his old memories resurfacing? He thought they’d be gone for good but apparently not.

Apparently, there were some things you couldn’t ever truly forget.

Tommy wrapped his arms around himself comfortingly in front of the dimming fire.

“Tommy? You okay?” The boy’s head snapped upright to see Techno looking at him from his makeshift bed.

Suddenly Tommy noticed there was something warm wrapped around his shoulders. He turned his head to look at the fabric and couldn't suppress the smile that bubbled onto his face. It was Wilbur's trench coat.

"Tommy?" Techno called again.

Tommy stuttered, "Sorry! Just had a bit of a nightmare. I'm fine, I promise."

Tommy looked behind Techno's bed to where Wilbur had set up his own and frowned. Wilbur wasn't in his bed. He was gone.

"Where's Wil?" Tommy asked, trying to hide the fear in his tone. Techno turned and grimaced at the lack of his twin. The man stood to his feet and shook his head.

"Probably takin' a piss or somethin'. I bet he's down by the river, I'll go check up on him and make sure he's not dead." Techno looked at Tommy and then handed the boy his frying pan.

"You stay here, kid. I'll be right back."

Tommy nodded and stood from his bed as well, deciding to stretch his legs for a moment before he went back to sleep. He watched as Techno disappeared into the trees, his footsteps slowly growing softer and softer as he got further away. Eventually, it was quiet again.

"*Well*, I thought he'd never leave."



Tommy froze. He could feel ice in his veins as the voice chilled him to the bone. *No...no, no, no. Fuck.*

He turned and let out a choked sound when his brother stared back at him, his sharp green eyes dark and angry. His green hood was drawn up over his head and his boots were caked in mud.

“Dream.” Tommy rasped. At that Dream gave him a bitter smile and pulled the boy into a hug that Tommy didn’t reciprocate. He was too tense to even breathe.

“Hello, little brother. Having fun, are we now?” Dream hissed into his ear and the grip on the back of Wilbur’s jacket tightened. He growled at the sight of it.

“How...How did you find me?” Tommy’s voice shook and Dream pulled back and gently brushed Tommy’s bangs out of his eyes.

“Oh, it was easy, really. I just listened for the sounds of complete and utter betrayal and followed that.”

Tommy let out a panicked breath and stammered, “D-Dream...I...”

Dream grabbed his wrist tightly and growled, “We’re going home, Tommy. Right fucking now.” *Fight. Don’t let him scare you.*

The man began tugging him along but Tommy resisted and tugged his hand away, stumbling back. “Please Dream, you don’t understand! I’m not ready. I’ve seen so much of the world today than I ever have before. I’ve learned so much from Wil-” Tommy bit his tongue.

“Ah yes, *the brothers*. The ones that half of the kingdom is hunting down like dogs? I’m so proud.” Dream sneered, his voice dripping with sarcasm. He tried to grab his arm again but Tommy pulled away, gripping his wrist.

His voice was soft as he spoke “Wait! I think...I think they like me.”

Dream's expression darkened and he said sharply, "Glad to know I'm so easily replaceable."
"That's not it and you know it." Tommy shot back and his brother rolled his eyes.

"Tommy, how dumb are you? They're playing you." He threw up his hands in exasperation while Tommy's expression faltered.

"This is why you never should've left. You're too fucking naïve to be here."

Tommy's voice came out small as he asked, "What do you mean they're *playing me*?"

"You're a means-to-an-end to them, Tommy. Once they've gotten what they want from you they'll leave you in the dust. Do you honestly think they're impressed by what you can do? They simply see you as gold, Tommy. A profit at best."

Tommy growled, "That's not true! They wouldn't do that."

"How long have you known them again? A day? *No, not even.* You don't know them, Tommy. They're dangerous."

"They saved my life. They didn't have to but they did. They're *good*," Tommy argued.

Dream grabbed him by his shoulders and shook him gently, "You're going to get yourself killed, kid. I'm your brother, not them. I know what's best for you. Now come *home. Please, Tommy.*"

"*No.*" Tommy hissed and pushed him away. He wasn't going to back down on this. Dream stared at him for a long moment before his expression darkened and he threw his answer back at him.

"*No?* Fine, I see how it is. Not even sixteen years old and so grown-up, eh? Since you're so goddamn mature now and clearly don't need me. Go ahead and give them *this*."

With that, Dream reached into his pocket and threw something at him. Tommy just barely caught it and his voice died in his throat when he saw Theseus' necklace sitting in his palm. He turned his

face up in bewilderment and asked, “How did you...”

“That’s the only fucking thing they’re here for Tommy. They don’t give a damn about you. But go ahead, give it back to them, you’ll see.”

“Fine, I will!” Tommy snapped but Dream continued.

“The moment they have what they want they’ll leave you.” He snapped his fingers and emphasized, “Just like that. *I won’t say I told you so*. Don’t look at me like that, you know best, right? Since you trust them so much, go ahead and put them to *the test*. ”

“Dream wait!” Tommy called out as his brother began to turn to leave. Tommy grabbed his arm.

Dream looked at him coldly and his voice lowered, “*If they’re lying, don’t come crying*.”

“*Brother knows best.*”

Dream pushed him away and Tommy fell to the ground, the emerald still clutched tightly in his hand. When he turned back to Dream, he was gone. He stared back at the forest and waited for his heart to slow down. Before he could even begin to process what had happened he heard footsteps.

Tommy looked at the necklace and frantically threw it on over his head, tucking the gem inside his shirt and making sure the chain was covered by his scarf as Wilbur and Techno appeared from the tree line bickering amongst themselves.

“Oh my gods, polar bears are not pets, you idiot. They’ll maul you to death before you could even get close enough.” Wilbur said, sounding exasperated while Techno merely replied,

“That’s why you don’t go after the ones with kids. Those are the ones who will one-hundred percent murk you. Now a lone polar bear on the other hand...”

“For fuck’s sake, Tommy will you please tell Techno how insane— Hey, are you okay?”

Tommy jolted from his daze and turned to face the twins. He waved off their concern and assured them, “Yeah, just spaced out a moment there.”

The brunette tried to hide the embarrassed flush in his cheeks as Tommy pulled Wilbur’s coat tighter around himself. Tommy gave him an appreciative smile. After a moment, Techno started up again with a shrug, “It’s not insane if you don’t get eaten.”

“Oh my god, I wish I was an only child,” Wilbur groaned, annoyed.

Tommy couldn’t help but laugh, the tension in his chest easing up a bit. But not much.

It was only a few hours later when Techno was awoken by the feeling of a certain bird poking him with her beak.

“Ow, what the hell?” Techno groaned, gently batted Crow off him, and then looked up at the night sky. “Crow, it’s like three in the morning, what?” The hybrid growled and Crow nipped at his collar, tugging him. Techno rolled his eyes and reluctantly sat up and held out his hand for Crow to perch on.

He narrowed his eyes at the bird and huffed, “Alright, I’m up. What is it?”

Crow fluttered off his hand and landed on Tommy’s shoulder. The boy was curled up in Wilbur’s coat, his face scrunched up tightly in his sleep. He was propped up against the fallen tree and his head was resting against it. His hands kept clenching and unclenching around nothing and every now and then the boy would whimper. There were tears streaming down his face.

The kid’s got serious nightmares, huh?

Techno turned back to look at his twin, confirming he was totally asleep and would never be able to blackmail him for this. The piglin quietly got up and sat by the boy. Tommy jerked in his sleep, his

eyes frantically darting around beneath his eyelids.

Uh...what am I supposed to do about this?

wake him up?

hug hug hug hug

E

good technoBRO

wake him up! its a bad dream!

we're rusty at this idk man

i agree with whoever said hug

“You guys are no fucking help at all.” Techno growled to himself and then winced when chat shouted at him.

“Fine! I’ll wake him up.”

be GENTLE

dont scare him!

E

don't be mean.

“Bruh...I’m not mean.” Techno argued.

ehhhhhhhh

ehhhhhhhhhh

you're a little mean

blood for the blood god and all that

be GENTLE

“Fine. I’ll be nice. Now hush.” With that Chat settled back into a low hum and Techno took a deep breath and gently brushed away the hair that was matted to the kid’s forehead. Crow perched onto Techno’s shoulder, keeping a watchful eye.

“Tommy. Hey, Tommy. Wake up, kid.” Techno said softly. Tommy shook his head in his sleep and grabbed his own wrist, digging his nails tightly into them. Techno quickly grabbed his hands and pried them apart before the kid could hurt himself more.

“No, no, no, go away.” The kid mumbled.

He tried again and this time shook his shoulder.

“You’re having a bad dream, Tommy. Wake up.”

He did not expect Tommy to shoot up as fast as he did and narrowly avoided bashing heads with him. Techno caught him by the shoulders as the kid looked around frantically at monsters who were no longer there.

“Hey, hey, kid. You’re safe. It was a dream, you were dreaming. Shh...” Techno soothed, trying to grab his attention.

Eventually, Tommy stopped struggling against his hold and Techno took a moment to wipe the tears streaming down his splotchy cheeks with his thumb in a gesture he would *never* admit to.

“Shhh...” Techno hushed and let the kid lean forward into his hold a bit as his eyes fluttered shut again. He wasn’t exactly *awake*, but he had woken him from the nightmare. Hopefully, his next dream would be more pleasant. Techno had a suspicion that Tommy probably wouldn’t remember this at all in the morning.

With that thought...*ah, fuck it.* Techno opened his arms up more and let the teen slump against his chest. He shifted himself so his back was resting on the fallen tree as well and Tommy was curled

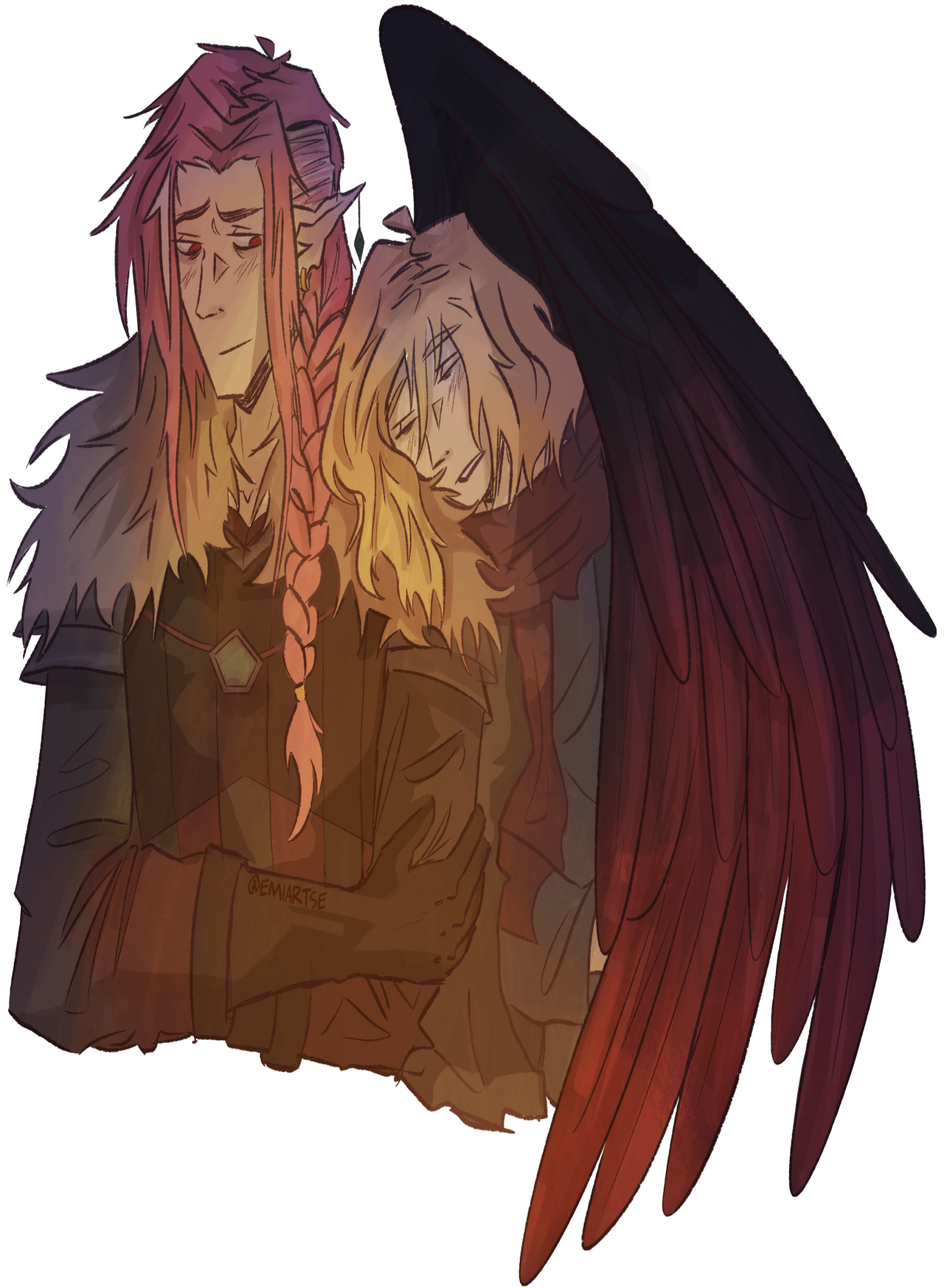
What did your brother do to you?

Techno took a peek at Wilbur once more, making sure he was truly asleep and then he turned to Crow and hissed, "I don't know how you would snitch but I still get the feeling that you would. *Not a word.*"

Crow cawed cheekily at him and Techno narrowed his eyes suspiciously. Tommy let out a choked sound and Techno frowned and gently rubbed circles into his shoulder as [he lowly sang to the stars.](#)

He knew his voice wasn't the best, definitely not as good as his twin's, but hopefully it would be enough to chase away Tommy's monsters.

At least for a little while.



Chapter End Notes

BEDROCK BROOOSSSSSSSS

CRIMEBOYSSSSSSSSS

AA

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

Except You, You Can Stay

Chapter Notes

happy spook month. here is your daily dose of found family.

TW: Blood & Gore. General Violence and whatnot.

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart<3
<https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

Word Count: 7k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Tommy woke the next morning he felt more comfortable than he had felt in a long time. Which was a little strange considering he had fallen asleep on a log. But he was too tired to figure out why that was. Whatever he was sleeping against was warm and cozy and Tommy wasn't about to turn that down. He nestled his head further into the warmth and heard a faint chuckle.

Before he drifted off he felt himself being shifted around and then laid down against the grass. Something soft was placed beneath his head. But the warmth was gone and Tommy let out a whine at the chill.

He felt a hand card through his hair, brushing it out of his face and then the gruff voice of someone humming something. A part of him wondered if he should open his eyes to see but the feeling of the gentle hand working through the knots of his hair with ease had him slipping back into his slumber once more.

The next time he woke was to the feeling of Wilbur thumping his forehead with his forefinger and thumb.

Tommy groaned and smacked the hand away before murmuring, "You dick, fuck off."

"Rise and shine, blondie. We've got breakfast ready," Wilbur grinned. Tommy huffed before sitting up. He took a moment to wipe the sleep from his eyes as a sudden gust of cool morning air wafted through the clearing. Tommy shuddered and wrapped the coat around his shoulders a bit more snug.

Oh.

Oh I still have the coat on, don't I?

He wondered if he should be embarrassed and give back the coat immediately or just say fuck it and stay warm. He was about to choose the latter when he felt the cold press of a gemstone beneath his shirt.

Theseus' necklace.

The nightmares.

Dream. His lies or...were they lies...? Tommy didn't know.

Everything had happened so fast last night that he really hadn't had any time to process any of it. But what he could process was that someone who had stolen the necklace of someone's dead little brother should probably give them their coat back.

Tommy felt an oddly familiar twitch in his hands to twist the gemstone in between his fingers which he quickly suppressed. Too many things were jumbled around aimlessly in his mind. Too many worries.

Dream's icy words and rough hands. The cold feeling of a ballroom floor. The scalding hot embers of his home being burnt to the ground with his sister and parents inside. George's blank expression.

His own blue eyes staring back at him, clouded by death.

He felt scattered. He felt confused. *He felt lost.*

He felt like he really needed to take off Wilbur's coat.

Tommy stumbled to his feet and practically ripped the trench coat off of him before holding it out to Wilbur. "Here...uh...thanks for letting me borrow it."

Wilbur's ears went red again but he nodded and said cheerfully, "No problem. Can't have you freezing to death on us, can we?"

"Weren't you cold last night without it?" Tommy asked a bit sheepishly and something mischievous sparkled in Wilbur's crimson eyes. The brunette grinned and whispered, "Nah, Techno's a cuddler."

"I will skin you alive. That's not true," Techno said on the other side of the smoldering campfire that he was trying to stamp out, his pink hair hanging loosely past his shoulders to his waist.

Wilbur rolled his eyes and flashed his teeth, "Oh yeah? What was that death grip you had on my arm last night then?"

"I will hang your carcass from the trees."

"Sheesh, that's grim." Wilbur shuddered and then turned back to Tommy and replied, "All half-jokes aside, my wing keeps me plenty warm."

Right. They have wings. One more revelation to add to the list.

Wilbur eyed his expression cautiously and Tommy nervously nodded, feeling tension in his stomach as he sat next to Wilbur and stammered, "R-Right."

"You...okay with that?" he asked.

Tommy stared at him for a long moment before responding. "Of course. It's not like you can control that. It's just...scary...for me."

“Because of what your brother told you?”

Tommy nodded and Wilbur furrowed his brow.

“I don’t know why he would lie, Tommy, I’m sorry. Maybe he just...*fuck* I don’t even know. But I know it can’t be easy realizing that he lied.”

Something else from last night rang inside Tommy’s head.

They see you as a profit. In the end...once they have what they want, they’ll leave you. Would they?

Tommy looked up at Wilbur and then to Techno. Their crimson eyes were identical in color but both expressed a soft fondness within them.

Were these the eyes of people who would betray him? Leave him lost in the woods or sell him off like cattle?

He felt the gemstone against his chest again and thought of their grief-filled expressions from last night as they discussed Theseus.

But there was always the possibility that he was simply too naïve to see the truth. So while his mind screamed at him to return the necklace, his fear won in the end and it stayed dangling beneath his shirt, next to his heart.

“Tommy?” Wilbur asked, and Tommy’s heart panged at the gentle concern he saw.

The blonde forced a sad smile to his face and confided, “It is. I just need time to think it through.”

Suddenly Techno grunted, his face uncomfortable as he tried to reach behind his back at his wing. “Not to ruin the moment, but can one of you get this feather? It’s just out of my reach and it’s going to drive me up the wall.”

Wilbur snorted and nodded but Tommy had already shot up from his seat to take a look. He might be scared of the possibility of hunters, but he wasn't giving up the chance to get a good look at wings other than the rotted red ones in his own spine.

Speaking of his wings. They were fucking *hurting* this morning. More than usual. They had been shifting around all morning and were close to driving him mad. *I guess I really didn't heal them all that well.*

Tommy sighed. He would just have to tough it out like he always did.

He waited for Wilbur to sit behind Techno before he decided to peer over his shoulder, his eyes wide in wonder. The feathers were almost akin to silk; they looked so *soft*. Techno's vibrant red and black wing was larger than his own wings and mirrored Wilbur's blue one in both size and appearance.

Right. Twins. Weird.

"So is that a twins thing or...?" Tommy asked and Techno turned his head. "If we had to guess, yeah probably."

Wilbur suddenly sighed in exasperation as he battled with Techno's knotted hair from where it had gotten tangled in his feathers,

"For fuck's sake, Tech. Tommy, can you get that stuck feather at the bottom while I fix this mess? Just loosely brush your fingers through the feather and dislodge any loose feathers or dirt you see, okay?"

Tommy nodded and quickly took Wilbur's spot. The brunette stood and began carefully detangling Techno's long silken hair. Tommy was about to dislodge the first feather when he hesitated and asked, "You sure you want *me* to do this, Techno?"

The man shrugged and then winced when Wilbur tugged too tightly at a knot, "As long as you don't rip out my feathers, then go for it, kid. I don't mind. Anyone is better than Wilbur."

“Ingrate,” Wilbur hissed.

Techno shot back, “Hard to be grateful when you’re ripping out my hair as we speak.”

Tommy let out a light laugh and tuned out their bickering as he focused in on the feather Technoblade had been complaining about. It was stuck right at the joint and Tommy knew from experience that it was definitely making him uncomfortable. He expertly dislodged it with one swift motion and he smiled to himself at Techno’s sigh of relief.

He found a few more feathers that were disheveled or loose and made quick work of preening them the best that he could. He had to admit, it was weird to do this on someone else’s wings compared to his own. He hoped he wasn’t being too rough but from what he could tell, the pink-haired man seemed visibly relaxed as Wilbur swiftly braided his hair.

Once the brunette had finished, he sat down by Tommy and began helping him preen his twin’s feathers. It flew by twice as fast with two people, and even more so with the amicable silence the three had fallen into.

As soon as they had finished Wilbur looked up at the teen, impressed. “You’re pretty good at that. *Really good*, actually.”

Technoblade hummed in agreement.

Wilbur trailed off, his eyes suddenly thoughtful and Tommy felt anxiety rise in his chest. Was he going to ask him why? Tommy started to bite at his nails. Eventually, Wilbur looked back at him, his eyes conflicted for a moment before they relaxed and he smiled, “Mind helping with my wing?”

Tommy let out a relieved sigh and grinned, “Sure, big man. Turn around.”

It didn’t take long to finish with Wilbur’s wing, with Techno helping him as well. And before long, Tommy was staring at a neat pile of blue, red, and black feathers. He gathered them up in his arms and disposed of them into the still simmering embers of last night’s fire.

After all, he couldn't allow any trace of the three to be found.

They quickly made their way through breakfast before eliminating every trace of their campsite. Tommy took his hair out of the ponytail he'd slept in the night before and began brushing the knotting strands harshly with his fingers. He winced when he tugged on one knot too hard and pulled out a small clump of golden hair.

He could hear Wilbur huff from behind him as he secured his pack to his back. "Gods, you're just as bad as Techno. Ease up before you rip out all of your hair!"

"I didn't exactly pack a brush with me, dickhead." Tommy shot back and Wilbur walked over to him removing his hands from his hair before he could cause more damage.

Before he could do anything the man asked, "May I?"

Tommy shrugged.

Wilbur opened his hand for the hair tie and Tommy carefully handed it to him before turning around and focusing his gaze on a frog he could see lounging beneath a bush.

It's a bit far from the river. Tommy thought but looking up, the sky was grey and cloudy today, and the threat of rain was becoming a real possibility.

Wilbur's fingers weaved through his hair, combing out the knots that always seemed to accumulate again within the hour no matter what he did. Dream had told him his hair was always such a mess because it was probably curly. He said if he'd actually bothered to care for it his hair wouldn't be such a hassle.

Tommy banished the thought for a moment and focused back on the frog. Or maybe it was a toad? How the fuck was he supposed to know? He felt another knot unravel from his hair and let out a soft sigh.

He had to admit. The feeling of being cared for was rather...*nice*. It was certainly new.

Dream...Dream never did stuff like this for him. Sure he would hug him and tell him he loved him or even occasionally ruffle his hair...but that was it. He never sang him to sleep. He never helped him preen his wings, or brush his hair. Dream never patched him up the way Tommy did with him. Sure Tommy could heal himself but sometimes...

Maybe sometimes he wanted someone to tend to him.

Tommy felt something wet sliding down his cheek and his eyes shot wide as he quickly wiped it from his face before more could follow.

“Sorry, did I tug too hard?” Wilbur asked and Tommy shook his head.

“No, no you didn’t. I just...my eyes are still a bit sleepy.”

Wilbur simply hummed though it didn’t seem like he was entirely convinced, but Tommy wasn’t about to say otherwise. After a few more minutes of careful brushing, Wilbur pulled his hair back into its normal low pony and took a step back.

If the brunette noticed that the boy needed a moment to take a few deep breaths and steady himself, he didn’t comment on it.

“Looks like it’s going to rain today...The sooner we get back to L’Manburg the better.” Techno said, breaking the silence. Tommy snapped himself out of his daze and nodded, grabbing his own pack from the ground and thanking Wilbur meekly for helping him with his hair.

“Best to get a move on then.” Tommy added and felt Crow land on his shoulder, returning from her morning flight. He saw Techno peering at her from the corner of his eye with a narrowed expression.

What was that about? Tommy shrugged to himself.

“It’s about an hour’s walk till we start nearing the roads, so we’ll need to be careful. Sam and Puffy’s parties are probably still lurking nearby.” Techno added after a long moment of looking up at the clouds, trying to track the rain the best he could.

Tommy nodded, “Right, your dad has people looking for you right?”

“Yep.” Wilbur responded, popping the “P”. The brunette shook out his hair for a moment as they left the campsite and trekked back into the woods, “We should be able to hide from them pretty easily but stay close alright?”

“Like glue, big man.” Tommy said with a salute.

“How about duct tape?” Techno interjected with a grin and the teen turned and flipped him the bird.

“Oh, *ha-ha*. You’re just salty I was able to knock you flat on your ass, bitch.”

Suddenly Wilbur grinned wickedly, “I know you said *I* couldn’t tell anyone about that, *but Tommy on the other hand...*”

“Good luck finding someone that will believe you, child.” Techno answered swiftly.

Tommy without thinking said, “I’m not a child! I’m a huge man!”

“Kid, you could be twelve for all we know.”

Tommy placed his hands on his hips and growled, “I am *not* twelve, you fucks.”

“Thirteen?”

“No!”

“Hmph.” Wilbur snorted and then asked, “Then how old are you?”

“*I’m—*” Tommy bit against his tongue as Dream’s voice screamed in his ear. **Never tell anyone how old you are or when your birthday is. Ever.**

Well, Dream didn’t say I couldn’t lie... But he had to pick an age that was believable. He was pretty sure he wouldn’t pass for twenty so,

“I’m eighteen,” Tommy said confidently.

Techno and Wilbur stared at him for a long moment, their expressions blank before Wilbur raised an eyebrow, “If you’re eighteen then I must be fucking forty, no way.”

Techno nodded in agreement

“Well—” Tommy stammered and then amended, “*I will be* eighteen. In...” ***Lie.*** “In August.” *That was when Dream’s birthday was but what the twins didn’t know wouldn’t kill them.*

“*Uh huh,*” Techno said, unconvinced but before either of them could argue Crow gave out a warning caw.

Tommy looked up to a nearby tree where Crow had flown ahead to perch. Tommy quirked his head quizzically at her. That was the signal Crow gave whenever Dream was nearly home. Why was she...

No, it’s too soon. He wouldn’t come back so soon. This is something else. It has to be.

Suddenly Technoblade stiffened at his side, his ears perking up alertly. Tommy felt Wilbur’s hand around his shoulder pushing him gently to the side as he asked his twin, “What is it? What do you hear?”

Techno held up a finger and closed his eyes, listening. Tommy took that time to draw his frying pan from its sheath. Wilbur did the same with his crossbow and loaded an arrow.

Suddenly Techno opened his eyes, terror flashing in them as he whirled around to the tree line.

Tommy saw the arrow first, shooting out from the left towards Techno's side. Tommy didn't think as he raised his pan and swung. The arrow's path came to a violent halt as its obsidian arrowhead shattered like glass against the cast iron.

"It's an ambush!" Techno yelled, nodding to the teen appreciatively. Wilbur swept Tommy behind him and shouted, "Stay behind me, kid."

"I can protect myself—" Tommy began but Wilbur cut him off.

"I know, but someone needs to watch my six."

"Stop cowering like rats and face us. Or are you truly so frightened that you must hide in the dark?" Techno hissed, his netherite sword glinting just as dangerously as the rage in his eyes.

There was a moment of silence and then a man stepped into view. His ashen blonde hair was shaggy and his eyes were dark. His white tunic sat underneath a gold chest plate that flashed brightly in the morning sun.

"Easy Blood God, there's no need for that." The man said smoothly.

Wilbur scoffed, "You fired at us, jackass."

The man smiled and tipped his head, "My apologies, some of my men have a rather itchy trigger finger. But no harm done, right?" His brown eyes were filled with greed as he turned to Tommy. A shiver ran up his spine at the look.

Suddenly another man appeared from the forest, this one younger, closer to his age. He had the same ashen blond hair and tan skin but his eyes were a glimmering shade of purple. The boy hissed as he glared daggers at Techno. “Not yet.”

“Easy, Purpled.” The older man said, placing a hand on the kid—Purpled’s shoulder, pushing him back.

“Punz, you said—”

“And now I’m saying, back the fuck off. There’s no reason for bloodshed. I’m sure we can come to an agreement,” Punz replied, his eyes still focused intently on Tommy. Wilbur shifted uncomfortably and pushed Tommy behind him a bit more. Punz took notice of this.

“Aw, how cute. You’re rather protective of him aren’t you, my prince?”

My what?

Tommy looked up at Wilbur in confusion but the brunette didn’t so much as flinch, instead he barked, “What the fuck do you care?”

Punz strolled up a few feet and Techno reacted immediately by stepping into his path, his sword raised as he growled, “Stay back.”

“Easy, Your Highness. I’m not here for you, no matter how pretty your head might look on my wall.”

Techno sneered, “You really think you could take me in a fight?”

Punz simply shrugged, burying his hands casually in his pocket as he replied, “Not at all, I think you could slay me with ease. But what are the princes of the realm against, say, twenty men?”

With that, Punz's party descended from the tree line, their weapons bared, mostly swordsmen. Tommy's hands were shaking in terror causing his pan to wobble a bit in his hands, but his eyes were still fiery with spite.

"I'd say your buyer set you up." Techno answered.

Punz nodded, "Probably. He wasn't exactly the most persuasive of men to barter with. Rather desperate if you ask me, but I never ask questions. Which is why I offer you a simple trade. One that ensures Prince Wilbur's survival."

Techno raised a brow at that, his eyes briefly flitting back to Wilbur. His twin shook his head but Techno still asked, "What kind of trade?"

Punz grinned darkly, "We let you go without a fight and I'll even compensate you with three-hundred gold. In return I get your little traveling partner."

Tommy's eyes widened in terror and he gripped Wilbur's sleeve fiercely. *Oh gods, it was happening.*

They'd come for him.

They knew. They knew what he was. The twins were going to give him away. Dream was right. Dream was right.

Dream was right.

Dream was—

"Over my *dead body*." Techno spat ragefully and backed up a bit so he could shield the teen as well.



“*Tch.*” Punz rolled his eyes and growled, “What’s he to you? He’s just some urchin you probably picked off the street, right? Some charity case for your poor grieving father? I promise I mean him no harm, I’m simply the delivery man.”

“Wil...Tech...? Please don’t...” Tommy whimpered and the brunette reached an arm back to take his hand, squeezing it affirmatively.

Punz leaned forward to take a closer look and his eyes widened in interest, “Oh...*I see.* After all this time, I would’ve thought such delusions were past the two of you. *How pathetic.*”

“Shut your fucking mouth before I bury an arrow into your skull.” Wilbur seethed, raising his crossbow and lining up the sight.

Punz sighed, looking mostly bored. Eventually he tilted his head and Purple disappeared into the woods then he turned to the three and said nonchalantly, “I have to say I’m rather disappointed. I was really hoping we could work out a deal. *Ah well,* more gold for me. *Kill the princes and retrieve the boy.*”

Punz paused and then laughed darkly as he eyed Tommy and the death grip he had on Wilbur’s hand one final time. “His buyer never said we couldn’t rough him up a bit. Do what you want with him.”

Wilbur hesitated on the trigger for a moment as the man sauntered back into the woods after who he presumed to be his younger brother. Finally, he swore, “Fuck!” And swung the crossbow around, letting it fire into one of the bowmen’s eyes.

Punz’s men descended onto them quickly with Technoblade jumping into action, immediately cutting down two sellswords with one fell swoop on his blade. Tommy swung at one of the men trying to advance against Wilbur as he loaded his bow.

The man swiped low, but Tommy jumped over the sword and cracked his pan into the side of his head, sending him to the ground. He briefly eyed the fallen man’s sword before he shook his head.

The frying pan is elite.

Wilbur fired another arrow into someone at Tommy's flank and Tommy swung again, nailing another guy in the knees. The man fell and Tommy bashed the pan against his skull, causing him to go still. He dove to his left seeing another arrow flying in their direction and blocked it.

"Shit!" Techno swore and Tommy's eyes widened as he turned to see Techno, who was in a three-to-one battle. Someone had managed to disarm him.

"Techno!" Tommy shouted and tossed his pan to the man which he caught easily. Techno paused for maybe half a second before he dodged one man's attack and then hit him in the jaw with the handle. The second man went low and Techno easily avoided it and then kicked the attacker away.

Finally the third man charged but Techno was ready as he side-stepped too quickly for Tommy's eyes to see and grabbed the man by his arm. He cracked him in the face and then when the second attacker came back he was quickly subdued with one blow to the temple.

"Okay so maybe I underestimated the frying pan. Not a bad weapon, kid," Techno shouted to Tommy with a grin and then paled. "Tommy, *behind you!*"

Wilbur was currently fighting off two other men but his eyes still widened in horror as Tommy whirled around weaponless to Purpled charging at him with a dagger. He somehow managed to grab the boy's wrist as they tumbled to the ground with Purpled pinning him.

There was a struggle as Tommy tried to throw him off but Purpled managed to elbow him in the nose, and the grip he had on his wrist slipped a bit, allowing Purpled to pin down his other arm with his knees.

Once he saw that he had the advantage, the boy sneered lowly,

"So *you're* the Golden Phoenix, eh? I must say, I was expecting someone with a little more fight than you. But I wonder if you really do build yourself back up from ash like they say? Shall we test it? I'm rather curious to see how your face will stitch itself back together after my blade is done with you."

“You’re crazy! You’ve got the wrong guy, bitch!” Tommy grunted, using all his strength to keep the knife from closing in on his face. But he wasn’t strong enough. This kid had a good twenty pounds on him and he was better fed. Purpled had the advantage. *Oh, fuck am I going to die here?*

“Don’t lie, Tommy. I know exactly what you are. Your buyer isn’t as slick as he thinks he is. It wasn’t hard to follow him and overhear a few more things about you.”

How? How could anyone possibly know about him? Dream had been so careful. This can’t be happening.

“Tommy!” Techno exclaimed while occupied by another group of swordsmen. Tommy let out a cry as the blade dug into his cheek. And then there was a swift woosh of something sharp hurtling towards them and Purpled screamed, clutching his shoulder.

Seeing the opportunity, Tommy hiked up his foot against Purpled’s chest and kicked him away. He scrambled back, and by the time he had the opportunity to gain the upper hand, Purpled had already tumbled back into the forest and out of sight, the knife still plunged deeply into his shoulder.

Tommy sucked in a breath as he looked up at who had saved him. A boy, maybe a bit older than him, stared back with perplexed eyes. He was most certainly a hybrid, though not one Tommy was familiar with. He had long two-toned hair and seemed to be split down the middle with one side a deep black and the other half stark-white. He had long horns and a tail that was wrapped tightly around his ankle. But the intense eyes that were staring back at him now were a vibrant green and red.

And then another boy sprinted out from behind the hybrid with a strange weapon raised and shouted, “Techno! Back up!”

Techno dove to the side as a deafening boom rang out. Tommy flinched as the two men who had their weapons turned to Techno were helpless as their heads practically...well...perhaps some descriptions are best left untold.

Needless to say...*they were very fucking dead.*

“Ow...” The boy with what Tommy guessed was a firework launcher whined and rubbed a hand at his furry ears. He saw the (maybe ender-hybrid? He’d read about the End once) smirk at firework boy.

The other boy had shaggy brown hair that fell over his eyes in some places and goat horns. His face was scarred pretty badly, it looked like a burn wound if he had to guess. He was wearing a dark purple jacket that didn’t quite match the green and yellow vest and brown apron he had on underneath. If Tommy had to guess, it probably belonged to half-n-half over there.

“Gods, Tubbo. Put a fucking muffler on that thing before you blow out my ear drums.” Techno hissed as he drove his sword into the abdomen of another mercenary.

“Sorry, can’t hear you, saving your life! Ranboo, dear if you would?”

The hybrid–Ranboo chuckled another knife over Tommy and the blonde turned to see it bury into the back of the last mercenary who had been trying to swipe at Wilbur.

“Who the...” Tommy’s voice shook as a wave of numbness tore through him. Tubbo looked down at him and furrowed his brow. He turned up to Techno and asked, “Is he one of them?”

“No! He’s not. He’s with us!”

Tommy saw Wilbur push the dead mercenary off him and then his eyes widened at the blood trailing down a large gash on his cheek. The brunette dashed over to him, with Techno not too far behind and fretted, “Are you okay? That’s his blood on your shirt, right?”

Wilbur pressed a bunched-up wad of fabric to Tommy’s cheek to help soak up the blood. After a moment or two, Tommy placed his hand overtop Wilbur’s letting the brunette pull away as he took the cloth into his own hand.

Tommy stared at him for a long moment, his eyes wide and unblinking. *They had...defended him? But...*

Why? They had...

Tommy swallowed back that thought before he burst into tears and instead replied. "I'm...I'm fine. He just marked my face a bit, nothing I can't fix."

"I dunno man, looks like a hell of a future scar to me. Welcome to the club," Tubbo grinned but Tommy kept staring at Wilbur and Techno. He let out a shuttered breath and pulled his knees to his chest.

He felt Techno press a hand to his shoulder and soothe, "Easy, Tommy, take a deep breath. They're dead. You did well."

"B-But they...t-they..." Tommy inhaled sharply and he shot an apologetic glance to Tubbo and Ranboo who looked rather uncomfortable...actually no...they didn't look bothered at all.

Ranboo grabbed Tubbo by the hand and they walked back to their horses, giving them some privacy, but not before Tubbo looked at him with an expression that Tommy couldn't understand... but he saw grief in his eyes.

He felt Techno's hand rub at his shoulder as he said, "We said we'd protect you, didn't we?"

But only till the necklace was in hand, right? Tommy wanted to ask. But instead, he stayed in his little fantasy world where he believed Wilbur and Techno actually cared about him.

And if this was his delusion then burying his face in Wilbur's shoulder made perfect sense. The brunette didn't hesitate to wrap an arm around him as he murmured, "Thank you, Tommy. Thank you for what you did."

"All I did was smack an arrow away." Tommy shook his head and then felt Techno's hand against his back as he said, "An arrow that might've killed me. It could've hit you but you dove anyway, so thank you, Tommy. Our father will reward you greatly."

Tommy pulled away from Wilbur when the smell of coffee and rain hit him once more. He turned to Techno and shook his head, “That’s not why I...I don’t want your reward, Techno. I’m not a hero. I’m just a decent human being.”

Tommy looked away. They were the princes. That’s why they’d been so vague about their past. Their father was the fucking Emperor!

Gods of all the people who could’ve climbed up his tower...

“Tommy...” Wilbur sighed but Tommy lowered his eyes and hissed sharply,

“Why did you lie? You said your father adopted you both from the Nether! You’re the fucking princes?!”

“We didn’t lie Tommy. We are adopted and our father did save us. We didn’t tell you because... well...”

Tommy’s heart sank as he lifted his head and echoed sadly, “You don’t trust me.”

Tommy didn’t care that it was hypocritical of him to say that, even though the weight of Theseus’s necklace suddenly felt ten times heavier.

“No! That’s not it, I mean--Well obviously, at first! But later on...It was just because...” Wilbur trailed off only for Techno to finish,

“It’s nice not to be seen as a prince sometimes, Tommy. And we didn’t want you to look at us the way you are now. We’re still the same guys. Nothing’s changed.”

Tommy didn’t answer, his eyes were distant as he stared past the twins. They said nothing would be different, but how could it not be? He’d stolen from the *princes*. If they didn’t lock him up, their father certainly would.

He wondered how long the sentence for stealing a necklace from a dead prince was. If Tommy had to guess he probably wouldn't see the light of day till his hair was grey.

You're being irrational, calm down. Wilbur and Techno aren't like that. They wouldn't do that. They like me.

For now. Who knows how they'll feel when they make it to the castle.

Finally, Tommy sighed and looked up as he asked, "I don't have to start calling you guys 'Your Highness' do I?"

Wilbur laughed and Tommy could see Techno stifling a grin. The brunette clapped him on the back and Tommy suppressed the cry of pain that shot through him as his wings ached.

"Course not. You're our friend. You can call us by our real names." Wilbur smiled and Tommy felt something warm build up in his chest at the words.

"Bitch, Ranboo and I call you 'Your Highness', what the hell?" Tubbo suddenly blurted out from the bony horse he was petting.

Techno shrugged, "Tommy's traumatized so he gets a free pass. Also, we told the both of you years ago that you didn't have to do that, the hell are you complaining about? In fact..." The man stood and walked over to Tubbo but not before the other horse there, a brown one, began nudging his head into Techno's chest. The hybrid grinned and rubbed the horse's nose as he whispered, "Good to see you too, Carl."

He then turned back to Tubbo and then looked at Ranboo with a passive expression. Then suddenly Techno yanked Tubbo up by his collar and grabbed Ranboo by one of his long point ears, tugging him down to his height as he hissed,

"Have the two of you lost your damn mind? What the hell were you thinking?"

Tommy felt Wilbur snort back a laugh at his side, his hand still pressed against the top of his back as the two watched from the ground. Tubbo flailed a bit and shouted, “I was fucking worried, you bitch! Put me down!”

“So you ran off with Ranboo and if I had to guess, failed to mention it to your father, who by the way is going to *murder* you when you get home.”

“Technically I ran off on my own and Ranboo caught up to me...” Tubbo winced and Techno’s eyes widened.

Before he could say anything Wilbur shouted from Tommy’s side, “You left *on your own*? Forget your father, I might murder you first.”

Tubbo snapped back, “You left without a fucking word! Both of you! Of course, I went after you!” Techno turned his gaze to Ranboo and asked lowly, “And you? What about you?”

Ranboo ducked his head sheepishly, “I stole Carl, probably put a few people into the infirmary, and then rode off after Tubbo.”

Techno dropped the two and spun around, his face angry as he seethed, “You two could’ve been killed! You’re kids!”

“Not to mention bloody targets,” Wilbur added, now standing up beside his twin. He crossed his arms, his expression cross. Tubbo simply flipped him off.

“This is all very rich coming from you, Wilbur. You’re the one who started it. All of us are fucking toast when we get home. Speaking of which, *who the fuck is he?*” Tubbo pointed to Tommy who had been watching the four bicker with an amused expression.

Tommy grinned and waved him off, “I’m just here for the entertainment, don’t mind me. Please carry on, it was just starting to get interesting.”

And then Ranboo answered, his low tone surprisingly soft for someone of his height, “Whose lost child is that?”

“I’ll bite you fucker. I’m not a child.” Tommy spat and the hybrid grinned.

“That’s code for ‘he’s a child’,” Wilbur snorted and Tommy chucked a pinecone at him. The brunette turned to him and then gestured between the three boys.

“Tommy? Meet Tubbo and Ranboo. Ranboo and Tubbo? Meet Tommy.”

Tommy proceeded to flip the two off as he said cheerfully, “A pleasure. Thanks for not knifing me earlier, ender boy.”

Ranboo gave him an awkward thumbs up and then offered a hand to help Tommy off the ground, which surprisingly, he accepted. Tommy let the bloodied strip of fabric fall to the floor and prayed the wound had clotted up.

He was about to instinctively heal up the wound when he remembered it was no longer just the three of them. And he didn’t know how Tubbo or Ranboo would react or if he could even trust them at all. What if they screamed or called him a freak? What if they attacked him? What if they convinced the twins that he was dangerous and they left him? What if...

“Tommy.” Wilbur’s voice called out and the teen lifted his head to where the brunette was staring back at him, concerned.

“You can trust them.”

How the fuck did he know I was...

He looked to Ranboo for a moment who was curiously glancing at him and then to Tubbo who had halted his still somewhat argument with Techno to see what was happening.

“Oh, Tubbo’s going to lose his mind when he sees this.” Techno chuckled and then folded his arms to grin at Tommy. Tubbo quirked his head curiously at that.

Tommy took a deep breath and then pressed two of his fingers to the wound. He felt the power surge down his arm and then trail into his hand, causing his index and middle finger to glow. Ranboo’s jaw dropped and he saw Tubbo widen his eyes in amazement as the wound disappeared from sight.

It was Tubbo who reacted first, running up to him and grabbing his still-glowing hand without asking. Tommy had no time to respond as Tubbo examined his palm in fascination, turning it in his hand.

“Uh...hi?” Tommy stammered and Tubbo looked up at him with wide focused blue eyes that...

...

His eyes. Tommy didn’t know why, but something about them looked *familiar*.

He couldn’t for the life of him explain why. Maybe they just looked like his own? But they were much too dark to match his.

Strange.

“Do your fingers just do that or does your whole body? Are you bioluminescent? What potion did you drink to cause this? How bad of an injury can you heal? *If I shake you will you glow?* How long have you been able to do that? Can you—”

“Primes, Tubbo. Let the guy breathe before you tear into him like that.” Ranboo laughed and then crossed his arms, leaning to the side against a tree. “Sorry about him, once he sees something new, he won’t shut up until he knows exactly how it works.”

“I am a scientist. It’s my job, sorry about that. But still, tell me literally everything. *I need to know.*”

“Dude, even I don’t fucking know how my powers work, they just *do*.” Tommy laughed and the brunette huffed but then his eyes glinted mischievously,

“Then I’ll just have to figure it out myself. Care to be my next lab rat?”

“Not so fast, Tubbo. None of your experiments on Tommy.” Wilbur intervened.

Tubbo frowned but then whispered to the blonde, “We’ll talk more later.”

Tommy snorted. These two were alright. They were funny, at least. Though Tommy wondered if now he would need to sleep with an eye open just to make sure Tubbo didn’t try anything.

Suddenly he heard Techno and Wilbur snickering to each other as they watched the three. Tommy vaguely picked up the sentence.

“Look Tech, *they’re bonding*.”

“They grow up so fast.”

Before Tommy could shout at them, Crow flew down from her perch in the trees and landed on one of Tubbo’s horns.

“Oh, shit...” Tubbo stiffened and slowly turned to Ranboo before whispering, “Ran, help. Nature has chosen me.”

The enderman grinned and said, “I leave you to your fate, my friend. I have Tommy now. He’ll be my new best friend. Say goodbye to Beeduo.”

“Beeduo?” Tommy asked, confused.

“I helped Tubbo build a bee farm one time in his lab and he left the latch open one night on the little enclosure we’d made. All the bees escaped into the hallway. Ever since then whenever the guards refer to us, they call us Beeduo. Real creative, I know.”

Tubbo attempted to look devastated as he joked, “Bossman, how could you betray me like this? I thought what we had was special. I can’t believe you would kill Beeduo like this.”

Tommy couldn’t help but laugh at the shorter boy’s antics. He lifted his hand and let Crow step to it. He let her hop to his shoulder and Tubbo relaxed, “Thank you, Tommy. You’ve saved my life, we are now best friends. Fuck Ranboo.”

“You two are so weird...” Tommy muttered.

Wilbur shouted back at them, “This is the shit we deal with everyday, Tommy.”

Tubbo smiled, his hair falling into his eyes as he said, “You have to admit we’re at least entertaining?”

“You’re better company than those idiots.” Tommy grinned and gestured to Wilbur and Techno. Tubbo cackled and then slung an arm around Tommy’s neck causing Crow to fly over to Wilbur.

“Tommy, I get the feeling you and I are going to get along, right Ranboo?”

The hybrid nodded, “A match made in hell for sure. The guards will be terrified.”

Tommy giggled as a warmth filled his chest from the instant acceptance of him from Ranboo and Tubbo. It was honestly shocking how unfazed they were by him and his powers. It was incredible, really.

Dream was wrong. People weren’t at all like what he’d been told. Well...

Tommy thought back to the hatred he'd seen in Purpled's expression as he'd dug his knife into his cheek. He'd seen the greed in Punz's eyes when he'd stared him down like he was made of gold. They had known about him. Someone had paid them to take him and bring him to gods knows where. No doubt it was for his wings, or maybe his magic.

Tommy sighed, so maybe Dream was right about the hunters. But Dream was wrong about Wilbur and Technoblade.

He had to be.

He looked over to Ranboo and Tubbo who were cheerfully chatting with one another and then to Techno and Wilbur. Techno was fumbling through his pack looking for something while Wilbur simply met his gaze with a smile.

Yeah, he had to be.

Chapter End Notes

Tubbo, Ranboo, Techno, and Wilbur all screaming at each other.

Meanwhile, Tommy and Crow in the background eating popcorn like they're watching reality TV.

BENCHTRIOOOOOOOOOOO

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

Are You Lost in a Dream?

Chapter Notes

huge shoutout to @arbitersart for putting up with my impulsive ass

TW: Blood & Gore.

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart<3
<https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

Word Count: 7.3k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“So, Tommy. What brings you to our fair city of L’manburg? I doubt you came here for the snow,” Tubbo asked as the five resumed their trek into the woods. Techno was riding Carl while Tommy found himself on Ossium, though Wilbur had the lead, tugging them along. Tommy had told Wilbur he’d never been on a horse before and he wasn’t brave enough to try riding Carl, so Wilbur had offered him to ride Ossium. Tubbo and Ranboo trailed by the horses and chatted happily with the teen.

He watched Tommy gently brush his fingers over Ossium’s ribs as he answered, “Uh...It’s kind of a long story...”

Wilbur bit at his lip, wondering if he should say anything. Tommy was going to have to admit that he stole Theseus’s necklace.

The blonde fumbled with his words, “Well er...you see...”

The anxiety he heard laced in Tommy’s stammering is what made up his mind.

“Techno and I accidentally broke into his home. He was all alone and said he wanted nothing more than to see the lanterns for Theseus. Long story short, we agreed. And here we are,” Wilbur cut in and Tommy looked down to stare at him with an almost touched expression.

“You just... took him? *Just like that?* What about his parents?” Ranboo joined in.

This time Tommy answered, “They’ve been gone a long time. It’s just me and my older brother.”

“So, then what about him?”

“I made the choice to leave myself, but let’s just say I’m *extremely* grounded when I get home.”

“Welcome to the club.” Tubbo gave a sympathetic smile and that seemed to be the end of the conversation. But Wilbur was sure that wouldn’t be the last time someone would ask the kid why he was with him and Techno.

“Wait you live near L’Manburg and you’ve never come to see the lanterns before?” Ranboo asked.

Tommy ducked his head and gave a weak laugh. “I don’t go out much...or at all in fact. Yesterday...uhm...” Tommy swallowed nervously before he exhaled. “Yesterday was the first time I’d felt the sun on me in...years.”

The expression on Tommy’s face grew distant at the admission and Wilbur could see the blonde picking at his nailbed. There was a slight glow at his fingertips and Wilbur realized that Tommy was rehealing the skin only to destroy it again.

The brunette couldn’t help but wonder how often he did that.

Ranboo and Tubbo’s faces dropped in shock and for a long moment, there was a tense silence. And then something light and hopeful sparked inside Tommy’s eyes and the boy smiled. “But now... now I’m here. I’m outside and I’m not afraid or at least I’m trying not to be. But I don’t feel so alone anymore, and I couldn’t be happier about it.”

Wilbur saw his twin turn to Tommy and give him a small smile. “You’re a good kid, Tommy. You’ll see the lanterns, I promise.”

“We both do,” Wilbur added.

Tommy smiled back with a heartfelt glance only for it to melt away into mischief as he grinned, “Bloody saps, the lot of you.”

“Uh, guys? Not to ruin the moment but it’s going to start raining pretty soon.” Ranboo interrupted Wilbur and Tommy’s slap fight before it could even begin. The enderman looked to the sky with a nervous expression. “And while everyone else here might be waterproof, I am certainly not.”

“Did you forget your water protection potions again?” Tubbo hissed and Ranboo nodded sheepishly.

“I was in somewhat of a hurry.”

“Does the water hurt you?” Tommy questioned, confused and Ranboo nodded again. “Endermen don’t do well with water. I might be half-human but I still burn just as easily.”

Techno sighed from atop Carl and asked, “Wilbur? Do you remember if Soulbound Tavern is anywhere near here? I could’ve sworn it was close to this area.”

Soulbound Tavern was an inn run by a man named Scott and his business partner, Pearl. It sat just outside the city and generally got good business. The only problem was that the closer they got to the kingdom, the more patrols there were and the easier it would be for someone to recognize the princes, not to mention Ranboo or Tubbo.

And if someone had sent out a scouting party after Tommy, then he might as well add the kid to the list of reasons of why going inside a public place is a terrible idea.

But Wilbur was familiar with Scott, maybe he could convince the man to turn a blind eye to the five, at least until the storm passed.

“It’s about five miles down the road if I remember correctly, but we’re going to need to be careful.” With that, Wilbur grabbed his beanie out of his bag and shrugged it on, covering his pointed ears.

He grabbed his white streak and tucked it under as well.

Technoblade tugged his hood over his head and Tubbo did the same, covering his horns and ears. Meanwhile, Ranboo stood there blankly, and Wilbur sighed. There really wasn't a practical way to hide Ranboo's features, they were just too noticeable.

Ranboo sighed and took his jacket back from Tubbo. He untied his scarf from his waist and shrugged the coat on in the hopes of hiding as much of his hair as he could. He then wrapped the scarf high around his neck so that it covered his mouth like a mask.

It wasn't the best disguise, but it would have to do. Tubbo fished out something from his pack and chucked it at Tommy, who fumbled but still managed to catch it. It was a small, green cloak that matched the brown one Tubbo was currently wearing.

"You had that this whole time and you still stole my jacket?" Ranboo asked, annoyed.

Tubbo laughed, "Your clothes are comfier, sorry Ran."

Tommy fiddled with the cloak for a moment until it was secure. Then he pulled the hood over his head, hiding his blond curls from sight. And then Tommy suddenly startled. Wilbur turned to see Tommy looking at his shoulder with a grin as Crow's head popped out from within the hood. Wilbur stifled a laugh at the irritated caw she made before flying over to his shoulder where she hopefully wouldn't be so rudely awoken again.

"Sorry Crow, forgot you were there." Tommy winced.

"Keep that up she'll leave you for me," Wilbur teased.

"She wouldn't dare."

Ranboo suddenly came up next to Ossium, eyeing Crow with a curious expression. Then he asked, "Where'd you find her anyway? She's quite intelligent for a bird, I must say."

Tommy shrugged, “Dunno, she just flew through my window one day and never left. She’s always been pretty docile, except around my brother.”

Wilbur bit back a snide remark. Tommy’s older brother. Dream. The mention of the man caused something dark and angry to coil in his chest. He couldn’t understand how anyone would ever be so cruel as to lay a hand on Tommy. The kid was just so inherently *good*.

“Your bird is a good judge of character then,” Techno muttered lowly. It seemed Techno didn’t care to hold back his thoughts. And Crow to his surprise chirped at him as if she was agreeing to the statement. Meanwhile, Tommy furrowed his brow.

“You don’t know anything about it.”

“I can read between the lines, Tommy.”

“Techno, *enough*.” Wilbur stepped in, surprised that his twin would be so vocal about his distaste for Dream. Usually, it was he himself who couldn’t keep a lid on it. His twin looked at him for a long moment and then at Tommy before finally shrugging and turning his attention ahead once more.

“Yikes. I’m almost afraid to ask.” Tubbo prodded, clearly not reading the tension.

Tommy unexpectedly snapped at him, “*Then don’t.*”

Immediately Tommy’s expression broke when saw the startled look on Tubbo’s face and he quickly apologized, “Sorry, that was rude.”

“It’s alright, bossman. I shouldn’t have poked,” Tubbo said, raising his hands in mock surrender. “I’m not always the best at reading the room.”

“It’s almost impressive how bad you are at it,” Ranboo teased, elbowing the man in the side, causing Tubbo to retaliate with a smack of his own. Tommy giggled in response and Wilbur relaxed as he felt the air clear between the five.

“You okay?” Wilbur whispered and patted the boy on the leg to grab his attention after the chatter had settled down. Tommy looked down at him with conflicted eyes and for a moment Wilbur wished he could know what was going on in that head of his.

“I’m just...stressed and nervous. And I’m still a bit shaken from earlier. *They knew what I was.* What I could do? *How...?*”

Wilbur shook his head. “I don’t know, Tom. I wish I could say I did. Someone must’ve seen something or...*gods* I don’t even know. It doesn’t make sense.”

“I haven’t left my home in years...just how? Were they so desperate to get their hands on my powers that they’d been waiting all this time? Or did someone...” Tommy trailed off; the rest of the sentence unsaid.

“Tommy, I wish I had the answers. I really do. But those men weren’t Angelhunters. They had to have been hired by someone who knew of your powers, otherwise, they would’ve gone for Techno and me immediately. After all, we’re the ones with wings,” Wilbur cut off, his voice suddenly hesitant, “Unless...”

Tommy looked at him in frozen terror and Wilbur immediately reached up and grabbed Tommy’s hand, squeezing it gently. He spoke softly, his voice barely audible. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought it up again. It’s just...you’re safe to tell us, Tommy. Techno and I have wings, and so does our father. It’s not something to be ashamed of.”

He didn’t want to out that Ranboo also had wings, he knew the hybrid would rather share that in his own time.

Tommy stiffened at the words for a moment before relaxing and returning the squeeze. Wilbur promised, “You don’t have to tell us. But know that it’s okay if you do. My brother and I have your back either way, okay? We started this little adventure together and we’ll finish it together.”

Tommy smiled weakly and released his hand while Wilbur tried to not let the thought of bringing Tommy back to that god-awful tower bother him so much.

“Wilbur!” Techno called, pulling away his attention from the boy. He turned to his twin who was pointing up ahead at a rather well-maintained building. Wilbur immediately recognized it as Pearl and Scott’s tavern. He could see the castle not too far in the distance and felt his heart pang at the sight. It wouldn’t be long now till he had to come face to face with his father...or gods-forbid *Quackity*.

That man was *definitely* going to wring his neck the moment he saw him. *Ah well...*if he died at the hands of Quackity he supposed he’d die a happy man. As long as Q got to him before Niki that is. Wilbur shuddered at the thought of her wrath.

“Yep, that’s the one. And just in time too,” Wilbur answered as slow rolls of thunder were already beginning to echo across the valley. He saw Ranboo visibly shiver as the first few specks of rain began to fall.

Tubbo gasped at Ranboo’s first wince of pain as the rain hit him and was about to throw off his cloak to help shield him. However, Tommy was quicker and grabbed the leads from Wilbur as he reared Ossium gently back a bit just like he’d observed Techno do with Carl.

Once he was closer to the hybrid he lifted up his arm and let the excess of the cloak drape over his head, acting as an umbrella. Wilbur couldn’t suppress the smile that rose to his face at the incredulous look Ranboo was giving Tommy, compared with Tubbo’s look of gratefulness. He could even see his twin looking back softly.

This was what he meant when he said Tommy was inherently good.

“Thank you, Tommy.” Ranboo expressed graciously while Tommy looked at him concerned.

Tommy shrugged off his cloak but made sure to never let it uncover Ranboo as he practically dropped it on his head with a grin. “Here. Take it. You need it more than I do.”

Something about those words made both Ranboo and Tubbo stiffen. Wilbur felt something prickly the back of his neck as Ranboo struggled to get his next sentence out. The enderling stared at

Tommy as if he were a stranger to him, which in all fairness, he was.

“*Ranboo.*” Tubbo grabbed at the hybrid’s arm and nodded to him gently. Wilbur looked to his twin who was mirroring the same look of confusion as they came into the stable.

“You good there, Ranboob?” Tommy said with a weak laugh, feeling a bit awkward that they hadn’t answered him back.

“Y-yeah, uh...sorry. Lost myself for a moment. Thank you, Tommy. I appreciate it.” Ranboo took the cloak and gently held it as a shield over their head.

Tommy grinned back like the sun, “No problem.”

With that the blonde leaned his head back a bit, looking towards the sky as the rain started to fall faster now. *Right. He’s never been out in a storm, has he?*

“Careful Tommy, don’t fall off Ossium,” Techno warned when the boy leaned a bit too far back, trying to feel the rain on his face.

“Oops.”

Wilbur chuckled as he hooked Ossium’s leads up to a post out of the rain. He let Tommy swing one leg over the side of the horse before catching him as he slid off. Tommy giddily bounced back out into the rain while Techno helped Tubbo lead Ranboo inside.

He watched the kid for a moment as he practically danced in the rain, letting his boots splash into small forming puddles and drenching the bottom of his pants. Wilbur smiled. He remembered watching Theseus do that when he was little.

His father held up the two-year-old by his hands and then let him splash into the puddles in their garden. If he thought hard enough, he could still hear their laughter even when Theseus fell, coating himself with mud. The toddler would giggle and try to throw mud balls at both him and his father.

Emotion pooled in his throat which he quickly swallowed. He'd already promised himself he'd stop doing that. Tommy's curiosity, though it appeared childlike, was natural due to the many years he'd spent locked away. He wouldn't sour their relationship any more than he already had with memories of his dead brother. Not anymore.

He was fond of Tommy. He couldn't deny that any longer, especially after he'd selflessly saved his brother from an arrow in the back. But it was that goodness, that bold fierceness, brashness, and stubborn curiosity that endlessly reminded him of Theseus.

But maybe he was just seeing what he wanted to see.

"Tommy," Wilbur called after clearing his throat. The boy turned to him with joy in his eyes and the brunette couldn't help but return the infectious smile he gave him.

"C'mon kid, let's get inside before you completely drench yourself."

"Boo, you're no fun." Tommy pouted but came anyway, darting under the porch outside the tavern. He wiped his boots on the steps so he wouldn't track mud into the tavern and then shook out his hair, effectively ruining the ponytail he'd had that morning. Tommy took the hair tie out and tied it to his wrist, letting his sopping-wet hair hang loosely at his shoulders.

"You look like a wet dog." Wilbur teased and messed up the kid's hair causing Tommy to bat him away with a growl.

"Yeah and I bite like one too, prick."

As they entered the doors of the tavern, Wilbur saw Tommy's eyes widen in amazement at the people within. There was a bar at the end and Wilbur could see his twin staring back at him with a worried expression. Meanwhile, Tommy's gaze shot right over to the piano at a side wall, untouched and seemingly forgotten in the back corner of the bar.

"You play?" Wilbur asked and Tommy nodded.

“There was a piano in the tower. You didn’t see it because it was in my room. It was one of the few things I never grew bored of.”

Wilbur nodded, though his heart hurt for the boy at the admission. He eyed Tubbo who was sitting by Ranboo and Techno. He seemed to be fretting over the small burn mark the enderman had received and Ranboo looked like he was exasperatedly trying to convince the brunette it was nothing to worry about.

Wilbur chuckled, “You should go ask Tubbo to play with you. He’s pretty good as well and that way someone at least has an eye on you.”

Tommy seemed to note the implication that he was worried about Tommy being by himself. The blonde grinned evilly and cooed, “*Aww*, are you worried about me?”

“Fuck off, gremlin.” Wilbur rolled his eyes and gently shoved the boy forward, leading him through the crowd of people. As they drew towards the middle of the tavern, Wilbur turned to his left to spot a group of people laughing loudly with one another.

His heart froze in his chest when he spotted a brunette sitting in a wheelchair with a blonde at his side with brightly colored parrot wings. The blonde was leaning heavily into the brunette laughing at some joke a man with white hair and piercing red eyes had made.

Oh shit.

It was the Dukes or at least two of them. Grian and Scar. And Wilbur knew for a *fact* that his beanie wouldn’t fool them, *especially not Grian*, who had known him since he was eleven. *So that’s why Techno looked so worried.*

“Wilbur?” Tommy asked, waving a hand in front of him, snapping him from his daze. Wilbur gripped on a bit too tightly against his shoulder as he practically dragged the boy quickly through the crowd. Before the boy could protest, Wilbur whispered frantically, “Sorry, sorry. Those men over there.” He threw a pointed look at Grian who was too absorbed with cheating off of his partner’s cards to notice him.

“What about them?” Tommy asked, wincing at the hold.

Wilbur quickly loosened it and replied, “They’re dukes. The blonde with the wings and the brunette with the scar. They know who Techno and I are, and I’d bet my life that they know Tubbo and Ranboo as well.”

“Why would they know Tubbo and Ranboo? I thought it was only you and Techno who were princes?”

Wilbur tilted his head as they made it to the bar and quickly answered, “I can’t answer right now, but you can ask Tubbo. I need to talk to Techno, okay? Take Tubbo and Ranboo to the piano and make sure the dukes don’t see them.”

Tommy nodded affirmatively, thankfully recognizing the seriousness in Wilbur’s voice. The brunette let out a sigh of relief when the trio made their way to the piano and out of sight.

He felt his brother at his side in an instant who quickly hissed in his ear, “This is not good.”

“I know.”

“That’s Grian and Scar.”

“*I know!*” Wilbur whispered loudly, trying to think.

Shit. This was bad.

“So what? We’re just going to hide from the dukes back here?” Tubbo asked, a bit peevisly to which Tommy nodded.

“Yep.”

“Techno said we’d be safe back here as long as we don’t draw any attention to ourselves,” Ranboo added and Tubbo nodded.

Tommy’s shoulders slumped and he looked disappointed as he asked, “Does that mean I can’t play it?”

Tubbo quirked up an eyebrow. “You play?”

Tommy nodded and gently brushed his hand over the keys. “I have a really busted piano at home, it’s definitely not as fine as this one.”

Tubbo snorted. *Just wait till he sees the one in the library.* With that Tubbo grinned, “What a coincidence my friend, as I *also play.*”

The blonde’s eyes lit up and he smirked, “Wanna try to play Rush E with two people?”

“Bro, I think that will actually make the piece even harder to play...” Tubbo gaped, though the idea made him laugh.

“I know.”

“Aren’t we supposed to be avoiding attention?” Ranboo pointed out.

“C’mon Ran...Just...block us out of sight with your tallness.” Tubbo asked with an impish smile that Ranboo only frowned at and then thumped him on the head.

“I swear to gods if the two of you get us caught...”

“I know, I know. You’ll throw me off a balcony or something. Now hush, I need to wreck Tommy at the piano.”

“Oh, you are on, bitch boy.”



“You two ought to be careful. There are guards everywhere,” Pearl hissed into Wilbur’s ear as she gracefully passed the bar, barely drawing any attention.

There was a second voice behind the two, this time Scott, “Is that the chancellor’s kid and The End Prince on my piano?”

“Technically it’s only the chancellor’s kid on your piano, the other one is just a commoner.”

Scott let out a dry laugh as he eyed the two who were attempting to play some fast-paced song together and failing quite spectacularly as their hands continued to get tangled with the other’s. He could see Ranboo’s shoulders shaking with laughter as he watched the two.

“You ought to let me hire the blonde kid then, not that his lordship’s son isn’t talented as well. They’re both quite good.”

Wilbur laughed, “Good luck with that. The kid’s pretty cautious and I doubt he’d be so easily swayed. In any case, he’s with us for a while, we’re taking him to see our father, and *no Scott you may not know why.*”

“Your Highness wounds my curiosity.” Scott had the decency to at least sound mildly disappointed.

“Such a *pity*,” Techno laughed.

Scott eyed something briefly behind the two but quickly shifted his gaze back to the two princes as he said, “*Welp*. I leave you to it then.”

As soon as the man had left Wilbur felt a hand on his shoulder. He flinched harshly as he was whirled around in his chair. Techno turned a bit more violently with a dagger in hand at the throat of whoever had grabbed his brother.

Grian looked back at him with an unamused expression at the dagger pressed against his Adam's apple, though Wilbur could see Scar tense at the action. He looked warily to Grian but the Duke continued to hold Wilbur's gaze.

Techno paled and quickly dropped the weapon as Grian smiled, "Your Highnesses. How good to see you! Though I must say you both are a bit farther from home than I'd expected."

Wilbur stammered, digging his nails into the wooden counter. "Your graces...I could say the same for yourselves."

Suddenly Grian's voice lowered disapprovingly, his brown eyes darkening. It was a bit bold even for the Duke. "Haven't both of you worried His Majesty enough? What are you doing here?"

"It's none of your concern." Techno hissed and this time Scar intervened.

"Your Highness, you must forgive my partner for his bluntness. He cares a great deal for the Emperor and for the two of you as well." With that, the man elbowed the avian in the side causing Techno to snort.

"We'll be home soon, your Grace. We've just come with some extra cargo," Wilbur said, turning his head back to Tommy who was laughing at something Ranboo had said.

Grian eyed the boy with a frown and then uttered, "Of what importance is he? He's just a common boy."

Wilbur growled, "He's of importance to us, *Grian*. I suggest you leave it at that."

Grian simply shrugged, "Very well, *Wilbur*. Will you be returning home soon? From what I heard from the Captain this morning, his Majesty and the chancellor haven't left their office since around midday yesterday. They're going to work themselves into an early grave if you're not careful."

Wilbur swallowed, suddenly feeling terribly guilty at the thought of his father and Schlatt boarded up in their office drowning in worry over the four.

And then Scar's voice rang out once more as he rolled closer to the man, "*What Grian means* is that they're worried about the four of you. Extremely so."

"I know. We'll be headed home as soon as the rain lets up and it's safe for us to move Ranboo." Techno said and finally, Grian nodded and then gently patted Wilbur's shoulder.

"It's good to see you, Wilbur, and you Techno. You've grown well since I last saw you." Suddenly Grian paused and eyed Tommy for a long time. Long enough for Wilbur to narrow his eyes at the man, almost daringly.

Grian simply gave a subtle bow towards the two and then wheeled Scar off despite the brunette's protests that he could do it himself.

"Do you think they'll say anything to the guards?" Wilbur asked his twin. To which Techno shook his head.

"Surprisingly no. No, I don't."

"Okay. Okay. I give in. My fingers are going to *cramp*," Tubbo huffed. Causing Tommy to pump his fist triumphantly.

"Oh fuck off, I can see your fingers twitching as well," Tubbo noted.

Tommy grinned, "Maybe so, but I still win."

Ranboo leaned his weight against the head of the piano, amused as he asked, "You're very good. Where are you from, Tommy? There aren't many common folk who can play as well as you can."

Tubbo saw Tommy pause at the question, seemingly unsure of how to answer it. Eventually, he sighed, “My family was from Logstedshire, not that I remember much of the place.”

Logstedshire.

Tubbo wrinkled his nose. *Odd. He’d never heard of it.* Tubbo considered himself knowledgeable on many topics and geography was no different, especially given his father was the Chancellor. History had been made a top priority in his education. Maybe this was a smaller village that was too little for official maps?

“And what about you, Ranboo? Wilbur made quite a fuss about you and Tubbo for being easily recognizable. What’s that about?”

Tubbo turned to Ranboo and let out a chuckle before the enderling turned to the blonde and answered, “Well to put it simply, I am the Ender Prince, son of the great Enderdragon and ruler of the End...or at least of what remains of it.”

Tommy’s eyes bulged in his head and he quickly nodded his head respectfully to the man.

“Oh don’t bother. It is more of a title than a birthright. I’ve only been to the End once and I assure you it’s long since fallen from the marvel it once was.”

“So I can still call you, Ranboob?” Tommy asked and Ranboo grinned with a laugh. “I suppose so. Though one day I may revoke that right.”

Tommy laughed and playfully punched the teen’s shoulder before leaning back and asking, “How is it an empty birthright? If you don’t mind the question?”

Ranboo frowned, biting his cheek. Tubbo knew first-hand that talk of his homeland was difficult for him. He was surprised Tommy had been able to get *even that much* from him.

“Um...well...when Emperor Philza freed the End, he released its people unto the realm, but those who stayed behind...” Ranboo paused, looking terribly pained.

“You don’t have to continue if it bothers you,” Tommy said with a strained smile but Ranboo shook his head.

“No, it’s fine, the people that remained lost their minds. Their freedom and souls. What remains of the End people lies within the Emperor’s kingdom and those who escaped. Whatever ghosts remain in the End...I am the prince of by title alone.”

Tommy’s jaw dropped and Tubbo saw the sympathy in his eyes. What he didn’t expect was for Tommy to grab his hand and softly say, “I’m sorry, Ranboo. I know what it’s like to lose your home but I can’t imagine losing your people.”

The End prince smiled and gently squeezed the boy’s hand. “Thank you, Tommy.”

“What do you mean ‘lose your home?’” Tubbo asked and the blonde dropped his head and began picking at his nailbed.

“My village was destroyed by Angelhunters about eleven years ago. The only survivors were me, my brother, and his friend, George. The rest...” Tommy trailed off, tears in his eyes.

Eleven years...?

Tommy took a moment to compose himself before turning to Tubbo. “And what about you? Are you a prince as well?”

Tubbo chuckled and shook his head. “No. My father is the Emperor’s hand. The Lord Chancellor of the Realm. I am his only son. Thankfully my backstory isn’t nearly as tragic as Ranboo’s or the twins’, though I was left in a box outside the castle by my birth mother.”

“Heh, *Tubbox*,” Ranboo teased only for Tubbo to smack his arm.

Tommy lowered his voice playfully and added, “Tubbo in a box, what shall he do?”

“Commit war crimes?” Tubbo suggested and Tommy paled, seemingly finding a bit of truth in Tubbo’s tone, causing the brunette to burst into laughter. “Relax. I would never harm the Empire, though anyone outside the realm...well...”

Tommy smiled, “I guess it wouldn’t end well for them, would it?”

“Unfortunately my father keeps a tight rein on some of my more *explosive* projects.”

Tommy nodded his head, his expression solemn until he asked, “Why don’t we try a new song, and you follow my lead?”

Tubbo nodded, his eyes ablaze with competitiveness as Tommy’s hand fluttered across the keys once more.

“You sure you’ll be able to keep up?” Tubbo asked, running his fingers daintily across a few keys.

“While you studied your books and explosives. I spent a decade studying the piano. I doubt you’ll be able to keep up with *me*, but you can *certainly try*.” Tommy grinned and Tubbo rested his hands on the keys, ready to follow the boy’s lead.

With a spring of his hands, Tommy began, fluttering his hands across the piano as if it was second nature. Tubbo recognized [the song](#) and instantly began following its dual role.

The composition in question came from an old storybook filled with fairytales about princesses with lost slippers and princes who turned into frogs. And while normally, Tubbo had enjoyed more nonfiction books, Ranboo had been the one to show it to him, claiming it was his sister’s favorite. (Tubbo doubted that.)

Tubbo’s favorite was the one of a maiden who’d been locked in a tower her whole life and had never once cut her hair. The song itself came from the part of the story where the maiden had been freed and was roaming across the land with her blind prince and their children.

Yeah...pretty dark for a kid's book if you asked him.

It was a beautiful duet and one Tubbo followed enthusiastically as he struggled to match Tommy's pace. The blonde was right, he was far more experienced than Tubbo could ever be.

As the song wafted throughout the tavern, Tubbo noticed people had begun to dance. In particular, he saw a certain pair of dukes roll from their tables to join the fun. Grian spun Scar around in his wheelchair with one hand, seemingly having a blast until one of the legs caught the back of Grian's ankle, causing the man to fall back into Scar's lap.

He saw his face break into a worried glance, probably fearing that he'd hurt the man. That was until Scar gave out a hearty laugh and began to spin the two. Grian let out a yelp and quickly wrapped his arms around the duke's neck as he held on for dear life.

He could hear Grian call out, "Scar!"

The man in question was beaming as he matched his tone, "Relax, Gri. I won't let you fall, Pearl would murder me."

"You are the worst," Grian responded without heat before leaning further into Scar and tucking in his wings so they didn't snag.

They looked happy.

Tubbo smiled and focused back on the song.

Tommy's fingers moved without error across the keys as if it was second nature to him. His eyes were shut as he moved with the music. It was clear he was no longer paying attention to whether or not Tubbo flubbed a note, he was lost in his own world.

As the song neared its end, Tommy turned to Tubbo to give him a bright smile. Tubbo's voice died in his throat.

That smile. It was so similar. It mirrored the one in his hazy memory. It was the one part of him he would never forget.

No, it's just an odd coincidence. I'm not doing this to myself again.

The piano. Theseus had been able to play as well, though he had been much clumsier then. The cloak. "Take it, you need it more than I do." Tommy had said, just like...

No, there's no way it's that easy. Wilbur and Techno couldn't possibly have just stumbled across him...

It was surely a coincidence. A terribly painful one.

Stop.

But Theseus should be able to remember him. Surely, he would've recognized his brothers. Surely his brothers would've recognized him! Surely, he would've recognized...me. Right?

And Tommy said he had a family or at least had one once. That he lost eleven years ago. What a fucking coincidence.

He had a brother. A living brother that Techno and Wilbur seemed to despise. Theseus had been kidnapped by two men. There were two men that Tommy knew and had escaped with, his brother and someone else...What was his name again?

Fuck.

And Logstedshire. He'd never heard of it...but maybe there was something in his dad's archive on it. If it had been destroyed by Angelhunters, maybe there was a record of it.

However, Tommy's lack of memory and preexistent family did pose a significant flaw in his theory. Not to mention the magic that Theseus had definitely never possessed.

I need more evidence than just a gut feeling and a few coincidences. I can't jump to conclusions on this. Anything could explain this. It doesn't mean that Tommy is...

I can't think about this right now. Not here.

The song ended and the audience clapped for them, though Ranboo made sure to keep his head turned and guard the two young composers from sight. Tommy turned to him.

"You alright there, Tubbo? You spaced out there at the end," Tommy asked, pressing a hand to his shoulder. Tubbo shook himself from his thoughts and gave the blonde a weak smile.

"Sorry just...lost in thought I guess."

Tommy looked at him for a moment and then shrugged. And then his brow furrowed for a moment in what looked like discomfort. He winced and rubbed at his shoulder.

"You okay, man?" Ranboo asked, looking at him oddly.

Tommy seemed to pale at the question and shakily replied, "Y-yeah, no worries! It's just a little—*ghkk!*" Tommy choked off a cry. He bit into his palm and nearly fell off the bench. His hand flew to his back, clenching at the cloth as he struggled to inhale.

"*Shit,*" Tommy rasped and looked at the two fearfully. He let out another muffled cry and this time couldn't stop himself from tumbling off the bench. Ranboo and Tubbo caught him easily and lowered him to the floor. Thankfully, nobody had noticed him.

Tommy bit back another wave of pain as Tubbo whispered, "Tommy. Tom, what is it?"

Tommy stared at him with pure terror in his eyes and frantically shook his head. He shook his head almost as if it was a warning.

Tommy scrambled backward as he eyed the door of what looked like a bathroom. He shot up to his feet and rushed over to it, throwing open the door before Tubbo could reach him as the lock clicked into place.

“Tommy. Tommy! Let me in, man. What’s wrong?” Tubbo tried to keep his voice low as he heard Tommy’s muffled sobs and then a horrible cracking noise.

His heart froze in his chest and his knocking grew louder. Ranboo looked at him helplessly, his gaze shooting over to Wilbur who looked like he was in a deep conversation with Technoblade.

“Tubbo...help. I need help. It hurts...” Tommy called out weakly after a terrible minute of silence.

“Tommy, open the door dude,” Tubbo called, kneeling on the ground next to the handle.

“I can’t...I can’t get up.” His voice was so frail. It broke Tubbo’s heart a little.

Ranboo finally huffed and shoved Tubbo aside. He turned to the teen and said sharply, “Go get Wilbur and Techno, I’m going to teleport inside.”

Tubbo nodded numbly back. And with that Ranboo vanished from sight into a wisp of purple particles.

The pain was unbearable, worse than ever before. He’d just barely locked himself in the bathroom before tumbling to the floor with a cry. It felt like someone had poured molten lava onto his back as his wings pushed themselves out involuntarily.

Tommy sobbed into the wooden floor as he felt his rotted wings hit the ground. *Please. Please, make it stop.*

He could practically hear Dream in his head screaming at him to put his wings away before he got himself killed, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't force them to retract. He turned back to look at them and gasped in horror at this sight. His wings were practically bones, with most of his feathers gone. The skin had torn through, and Tommy was bleeding pretty badly.

His remaining feathers were either bent or torn, not to mention way smaller than they should be.

This was beyond something he could heal in a few minutes. It would take days to fix this. Not to mention he was too weak to even try to summon his powers. This was out of his control.



He needed help.

He couldn't do this by himself. He called out for Tubbo weakly. His head was spinning as he maneuvered himself to lean against the wall, in hopes that it might slow the bleeding.

He heard a loud *vwoop* and then a gasp. He looked up and his heart leaped into his chest as Ranboo stared back at him horrified at the sight before him.

He's going to tell. He's scared of me. He'll tell the hunters where I am and they'll drag me away.

Tommy curled in on himself and begged the hybrid, "Please...*Please Ranboo*. Don't tell anyone. They'll kill me. Or worse. Please. *Please don't tell on me.*"

Tears streamed down his face as Ranboo knelt in front of him and gently wiped the tears from his face, wincing a bit at the pain of the water stinging his fingertips. He gently took Tommy's hands into his own and spoke softly.

"I won't tell the hunters, Tommy. I would never *ever* do that. You don't need to be afraid of me. I know you must be in so much pain. But nobody is going to hurt you. I won't let them."

"W-What do you mean 'you know'?" Tommy whimpered.

Ranboo gave him a sad smile as large violet-nearly black- dragon wings appeared from behind him. Tommy couldn't help but notice the tears and jagged scarring within them. Someone had ripped them to shreds.

"You can trust me, Tommy. I know you haven't known me long but I know what it's like to be hunted. To be deathly afraid of the monsters getting you. But I would *never* hurt you, Tommy. And neither would Tubbo. Not to mention Wilbur and Techno."

Ranboo squeezed Tommy's hands gently and soothed, "It's okay to be afraid, Tommy. But you're not alone. Not anymore."

Tommy sobbed, and this time it wasn't because of the pain. It was because for the first time ever... *he believed him*. It hadn't been a delusion, none of it had been.

They really did care. Even Ranboo and Tubbo.

They care about me.

There was a frantic knock at the door and Tommy heard Wilbur's panicked voice call out, "Tommy?! Ranboo?! Open the door!"

Ranboo looked at Tommy for a long moment, presumably searching for his permission. Tommy stared at the door like it was Pandora's box about to open up and destroy him. And yet he let out a defeated whimper as he felt the fight leave him.

He nodded and Ranboo unhooked the lock but not before tucking his wings back in to make room.

The twins burst through the door and Tommy winced as he saw Wilbur slap a hand over his mouth at the sight of Tommy. Techno looked pained as he stared at the blonde's broken wings.

"Oh...*Tommy*..." Wilbur's voice shook and that alone was enough to send the tears welling up in his eyes spilling over.

"I-I'm sorry. I'm sorry I lied...*I'm so sorry*." Tommy's voice broke and he leaned forward to bury his face in his hands.

Wilbur dropped to his knees in front of him and carefully gathered the boy into his arms, seeming unfazed by the blood dripping onto his clothing.

"Ran. Tubbo. See if you can get Pearl or Scott to give us some towels or bandages. Just *something*. *Don't tell them what it's for*," Techno said sharply before he too knelt at Wilbur's side, cautiously avoiding jostling Tommy's wings.

“I was scared...He told me I should be scared. He said...H-He...” Tommy broke off with another hiss of pain as he tucked his face into Wilbur’s shoulder.

“*Shhh*...It’s okay, Toms. We’re not mad at you,” Wilbur said, slowly carding his fingers through his hair.

“We need to get him to Bad, *now*,” Techno said urgently as he gently rolled small circles into the teen’s shoulders, trying to relieve some of the pressure.

“N-No...*No*...I don’t want anyone else to know. I can fix them. I-I can do it.” Tommy lifted his head and grabbed at Techno’s wrist as he pleaded, “I only trust you two. *Please*, Techno.”

“Tommy, listen to me kid. You can’t heal this; you can barely keep your eyes open. They’re *rotting*. You could lose them if you keep going like this. *Please, Tommy. Let us help.*”

“*He’ll know. Dream always knows. I don’t know what he’ll do if he finds out.*” Tommy begged.

“I won’t let that happen, Tommy. He’ll have to get through me first. Nobody deserves this, kid. *You don’t deserve this.*”

Tommy shook his head, “I do though. I disobeyed Dream. I ran away. I broke his trust. He should be mad at me.”

“He’s *abusing* you, Tommy. I need you to see that. It’s not okay what he’s doing to you.” Tommy could tell Techno wanted to say more, he could see the anger ablaze in his eyes. The blonde dropped his eyes to the floor and leaned further into Wilbur, trying to hide from the truth.

He knew the man meant well, but Techno was wrong. Tommy was ungrateful for the safety and love Dream had provided for him. He’d been selfish for wanting more. The pain was simply the price he had to pay for being born a freak. A magical glowing winged freak.

Techno didn't understand that.

"Dream loves me. He keeps me safe," Tommy said, though there was no fire in his voice to really tell if he meant that or not.

Techno gently pulled Tommy out from Wilbur's shoulder and held his face lightly in his hands still giving Tommy the freedom to pull away. Techno inhaled frustratedly as he spoke lowly, his voice filled with emotion that seemed almost foreign coming from the normally stoic man.

"That isn't love, Tommy."

Chapter End Notes

WHAT IS LOVE? BABY DONT HURT ME

DONT HURT ME

NO MORE

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

This Is Our Little Corner of the Universe

Chapter Notes

chugs cough syrup LETS GOOOO

TW: Blood/Injury

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart<3
<https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

Word Count: 7.3k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Don’t say that,” Tommy hissed at the claim. *What did he know? He hadn’t lived with him. He hadn’t grown up with him. What did Techno know of Dream’s love for Tommy?*

Not a goddamned thing.

“I’m sorry, but I’m not gonna sugarcoat it for you, Tommy. You deserve better.”

“*Fuck you, man,*” Tommy slurred back, dizzy from the blood loss that Wilbur was frantically trying to staunch while waiting for Tubbo and Ranboo. “What do I deserve? Huh? Dream saved my life. He’s been protecting me all these years out of the kindness of his heart—”

“Tommy, I don’t protect Wilbur out of the ‘kindness of my heart’. I do it because he’s my brother and I love him. There shouldn’t be strings attached when it comes to love. It’s not meant to be wielded as a weapon against you. You shouldn’t have to earn the love of the person who’s supposed to keep you safe.” Techno exhaled, clearly uncomfortable with speaking so intensely.

Tommy should’ve kept his mouth shut, should’ve kept his venom to himself. But if Techno was going to dig at him he’d dig back harder.

“What would *you* know about that anyway?”

Techno's eyes hardened at the jab and Tommy felt Wilbur shudder at his side.

"I'm going to blame what you just implied on the fact that you are in pain right now, Tommy," Techno growled.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

Tommy hiccupped and nodded, feeling shame wash through him. He tried to apologize but nothing came out other than a trickle of blood down his chin. Tommy coughed and tried again as he leaned out of Wilbur's grasp towards Techno.

"I-I'm sorry. I didn't m-mean that. I don't know why I-"

"Tommy, hold still!" Wilbur exclaimed as he lost pressure on the wound in his back, causing the blood to once again begin to spill. Tommy lost his balance once he no longer had Wilbur to lean on. Techno caught him with ease and held him in place so Wilbur could hold it again.

There was a knock at the door and Wilbur let out a sigh of relief. "Fuckin' finally."

Ranboo teleported in and opened the door for Tubbo who had medical supplies in hand and a very concerned look on his face. Wilbur quickly grabbed the towels from him and pressed them up against Tommy's back, trying to soak up the rest of the blood.

Tommy winced in pain but tried not to lean forward into Techno. He already felt bad enough about what he said, he wasn't going to force the man to comfort him.

"Techno, help him take off his shirt so I can bandage this, we don't have any regeneration potions so it'll have to do."

Thank the fucking gods I put the necklace in my pocket this morning.

It had felt wrong to wear it, so he'd tucked it into a pocket that could be closed on the side of his pants. At least one thing could go right today.

Tommy winced as he lifted his arms and looped the shirt over his head. Thankfully he'd had enough sense to pull up his shirt before his wings had broken free.

As Wilbur began to bandage his back, Tommy felt himself drooping more and more, until finally Techno sighed and pulled him closer so he could at least lean against his shoulder. The action shouldn't have made Tommy cry but it nearly did.

"I-I'm sorry," Tommy said to Techno, his voice barely above a whisper. Techno didn't say anything, instead, he slowly began to rub circles into one of his shoulders.

Just as they were finishing up bandaging Tommy's injuries, there was a knock and Tommy froze. Something slid beneath the door. Tubbo knelt down and grabbed what seemed to be a napkin with ink on it. He quickly opened it.

His eyes widened as he hastily read its contents.

"What is it, Tubbo?" Wilbur asked while trying to clean up some of the blood on the floor. Tommy leaned heavily into Techno's chest, too tired to remember himself at that moment.

"It's from Grian. He says someone saw Carl and Ossium and alerted the guards. It's a five-minute warning for us to clear out."

Tommy slurred, "I can't put my wings back...they won't go back in. I can't let anyone see..."

"Tommy we'll get back to the castle faster if the guards take us," Techno sighed.

"No!" Tommy cried, jerking upright a bit, or at least tried to. Techno's tight grasp around his waist kept him from further injuring himself. "There has to be another way."

“We could always sacrifice Ranboo and Tubbo,” Wilbur suggested, shrugging at Techno. The man scoffed.

“Hey! We’re right here!” Tubbo growled and then chuckled the wadded-up napkin at Wilbur’s head.

“You two were the last ones seen with the horses. Tommy, Wil, and I can sneak out through the back and make our way to the kitchen entrance. If you both get caught, it will clear the patrols off the streets and we can get there quickly. Besides, it’s still raining outside, Ranboo.”

“I resent this idea. I’m too young to die, Techno. And I will not have my father murder me before yours does,” Tubbo argued.

“Speak for yourself, my brother is probably on that patrol,” Ranboo added with a wince.

Before Wilbur or Techno could argue back, Tommy sat up a bit from Techno’s shoulder and called out weakly, *“Please.”*

“Oh, gods, not the sad eyes. Ranboo don’t look!” Tubbo tried to cover his face but it was too late as Ranboo’s strong front instantly caved.

The hybrid looked over at Tubbo with a soft expression and said, “Dude, I’m sorry but we’ve got to take the L.”

“You are a weak man, Ranboo Beloved,” Tubbo responded while shaking his head. He looked to Tommy, who still looked absolutely pitiful and sighed. He stamped his foot on the ground in annoyance. “You guys suck.”

Tommy attempted a grateful smile as Techno helped him up onto his feet. Wilbur handed him his jacket which he looked at confused for a moment till he clarified, “It’s long enough to hide your wings.”

His legs shook violently as he put the coat on. A gust of wind would be all it took to knock Tommy over at this rate. Wilbur placed a hand on Tommy’s shoulder and asked, “You okay to walk,

Toms?”

Tommy smiled at the nickname and nodded. “I think so.”

He took a shaky step forward and his knees buckled immediately. *Welp. Apparently not.*

Techno was quick to catch him. He hooked his arm under his knees and hoisted him into his hold as if he weighed nothing.

“Sorry,” Tommy apologized *again*, but Techno shook his head.

“It’s alright, kid.” And then Techno’s voice dropped and he whispered, “I pushed you too and I shouldn’t have. I’m sorry,”

“S’okay. We were both assholes.” Tommy leaned his head against Techno’s shoulder. He was so tired. So tired of being afraid. But at that moment he’d never felt safer than in Techno’s arms.

As they went out the door Tommy gave Tubbo and Ranboo a solemn salute and asked, “I’ll see you guys later?”

Ranboo smiled. “Of course. You’re stuck with us now. There is no escape from Tubbo once he’s decided he likes you.”

Tubbo simply nodded as if it was common knowledge.

Techno paused briefly to look at Ranboo and said softly, “You’ll be fine, kid. Jack might have a short fuse but he fizzles out pretty quickly. He won’t be mad for long.”

“Oh it’s not Jack that I’m afraid of,” Ranboo clarified.

Techno barked a dry laugh. “Yeah, no, there is no saving you from Niki. But hopefully, she strangles Wilbur first.”

“Your families terrify me,” Tommy interjected loopily and the two laughed.

“C’mon we gotta go. They’re almost here,” Wilbur hissed, suddenly sounding panicked. Techno heard the thunder of hooves outside the tavern and he nodded to the boys as they fled through the back door and into the rain.

Tubbo tapped his foot nervously as the door slammed shut. He felt Ranboo grab his hand as they made their way through the tavern, closing in on the door.

“We can do this.”

“My dad’s gonna be so pissed at me.” Tubbo’s voice was shaky.

“Is that what you’re really afraid of? The anger?”

Tubbo shook his head. “No. I’m afraid because I know I scared the hell out of him and he doesn’t deserve that. I just don’t want to hear how disappointed he is in me.”

Ranboo sighed and squeezed his hand. “It’s gonna be okay, Tubbo.”

The two stopped a few feet from the door and Ranboo could see Grian and Scar staring at them from the corner with confused expressions. At least until they realized the twins and Tommy were nowhere to be found.

“Stay inside. It’s still raining out there. Let me talk to them first,” Tubbo said and Ranboo nodded quickly, guilt already boiling in his gut. Tubbo squeezed his hand one last time and pushed through the doors. He could hear Sam’s voice ring out from outside and he flinched.

It wasn't just that he didn't want to see the way he'd scared his siblings. There was also the fact that he could very well be arrested the moment he went through the door. He was pretty sure he'd put a few people in the infirmary during his escape.

Ranboo took a deep breath and went through it as well. He held the cloak up over his head as rain poured down overhead. He saw Tubbo turn in shock and Ranboo winced as he felt the cloak begin to soak.

"Sam!" Ranboo called.

"Your Highness. You should be inside. It's not safe for you out here."

"How many, Sam?" Ranboo asked and Sam looked at him in confusion for a minute before the green-haired man finally understood.

"Four. They've all recovered though."

Ranboo wanted to throw up. *Four. He'd put four people in the infirmary all because he couldn't hold himself together.*

"And Schlatt?"

Tubbo's eyes widened at that, confused. The hybrid shook his head. "He's fine. You ran off before he could stop you. It's time to come home, your Highness. The guards know that you don't have control of yourself in that form, they knew there would be risks. You're not in trouble."

"I should be," Ranboo muttered to himself.

Sam looked down at Tubbo. "It's time for you to come home as well."

Tubbo nodded solemnly and exhaled. Suddenly a man neither of them recognized rode up next to Sam and handed him something. The hybrid grinned as he tossed it to Ranboo.

“Water protection potion. Hurry before you burn yourself.”

You don't have to tell me twice. Ranboo thought as he quickly drank the contents. The hybrid sighed as he felt its effects and carefully lowered the cloak, letting the rain soak his hair without consequence.

“Ranboo!” A voice called out and the enderman winced as he recognized it instantly. Jack rode up beside Sam and quickly jumped off the horse.

“H-Hi Jack,” Ranboo squeaked as the shorter man marched up to him looking rightly *pissed*. Jack engulfed his little brother into his arms (well tried to, Ranboo was nearly a foot taller than him) before another word could be said.

“Stupid kid,” He heard Jack mumble into his shirt as Ranboo gladly returned the hug.

“Sorry,” Ranboo replied into his brother's shoulder.

Jack pulled back and grabbed the boy by his shoulders, shaking him slightly as he growled, “Are you insane?!”

Ranboo laughed, “I missed you too, Jack.”

The three managed to make it through the gates with little to no fuss. The rain made it pretty hard for anyone to recognize them anyway. They took backroad after backroad, still occasionally having to dodge a guard every now and again. Tommy at some point began to nod off, even with the rain pouring on his face.

Every now and again he'd wake up if he was jostled too harshly or whenever Techno tapped him to see if he was okay. He wasn't. But Tommy didn't want to worry them. All he needed was the strength to heal himself and he'd be golden.

The dizziness wouldn't go away though. It was part of the reason he kept falling asleep. If he kept his eyes open he'd be more likely to hurl his guts out.

He was so tired. He just wanted to fall asleep again. Wilbur and Techno would keep him safe. It was okay to close his eyes for a few minutes...*It was ok—*

"Tommy. Kid. Stay awake for me alright? No more going to sleep," Techno said, sensing the boy's drowsiness. Tommy huffed and rolled his head back to look at the man.

"M'tired though."

"Sucks. Can't be tired. It's cringe. You are officially banned from sleep until further notice," Techno replied, still looking straight ahead, but he jostled him a bit to keep him awake.

"This is cruel and unusual punishment," Tommy muttered grouchily and he heard Wilbur chuckle at that. The brunette hung back a few steps so he was at Techno's side and gently placed his hand on Tommy's pulse.

"I'm alive and well, big man," Tommy joked. Wilbur gave him a weak smile yet he could still see the worry in his eyes.

"Your heart sounds like it's trying to run a marathon," Wilbur said, biting the inside of his cheek. Tommy waved him off with a weak excuse.

"It be like that sometimes."

"*Tommy,*" Techno warned. "Be serious. How do you feel?"

Tommy replied irritably, "I already told you, 'm fuckin' tired. I'll be fine."

His head felt light.

"What are the chances you think his wings are infected?" Wilbur asked, ignoring the delirious boy lying limp in Techno's arms.

Techno mulled it over a moment before responding, "Given the state they were in I'd say pretty high."

"I'm right fuckin' here," Tommy growled. "And that's not possible. I can't get sick, my powers practically burn any weird viruses or infections to a crisp whenever I heal myself."

"True. But you haven't exactly been taking care of your body lately have you?" Wilbur pointed out. "When was the last time you really healed your wings? Like *fully* healed them."

Uh...

Tommy didn't answer. Instead, he tucked his head against his chest and refused to meet Wilbur's gaze.

"Tommy," Techno prodded, unwilling to let the topic drop.

Tommy shook his head as he whimpered out, "I—I don't remember. It's been a while. Dream doesn't let me use my powers unless I have permission."

Wilbur's eyes hardened and Tommy cowered a bit at the admittance. *Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Why did I say that?*

"Kid," Wilbur began and Tommy could tell he was about to start throwing accusations at Dream again.

Tommy snapped, “*Don’t*. I don’t want to hear it. I know you think you know me but you don’t. You have no idea what my relationship with Dream is like so please stop pretending you do.”

Tears burned in the corners of Tommy’s eyes as a truth sunk in. “Don’t talk to me like I’m some child who can’t see what’s actually happening in front of them. I promise you. *I see it. I see it everyday.*” He turned his face away.

Wilbur was stunned for a moment at his words but he quickly recovered as he shook his head in confusion. “Then why...?”

Tommy’s voice broke as he answered, “What else am I supposed to do? He’s all I have.”

The answer seemed to cause something to click inside Wilbur’s mind and he sucked in a breath. It looked like what he wanted to say was right on the tip of his tongue but he couldn’t find the courage to say it. Tommy hated the fact that some selfish part of him wanted him to. *Say it. Say it.*

Instead, Wilbur dropped his head and the conversation ended as they drew closer to the castle. With each passing minute, Tommy could feel himself getting weaker. Something was terribly wrong. He wasn’t bleeding anymore, *probably*. So he wasn’t sure why his head was spinning or why large black dots prickled at his vision.

“He’s getting worse, Wil. How much further?” Techno asked after it had taken a scary amount of time to rouse Tommy from the doze he kept unintentionally falling back into.

Tommy’s eyes fluttered open and he felt so much worse than he had before. He slurred tiredly to the brunette, “M’tired, Wil. M’real tired.”

Wilbur looked pained even through his blurry vision. His hair was soaked and he’d long since given up on trying to clean the water off his glasses. The man brushed the boy’s bangs out of his eyes and replied comfortingly, “Almost there, Toms. Just hang on a little longer, okay?”

Tommy nodded loopily and fell back into his light doze despite Techno’s protests. Somehow he was still able to hear Techno and Wilbur talk through the rain and wind.

“Wil–”

“I know! I know! I just...I’m not sure how we’ll be able to get him to Bad without drawing attention.”

“Who cares? Look at him, Wilbur! He needs a doctor or at least a health potion.”

He heard Wilbur gasp. “That’s it! I think I’ve got an idea, actually. But I’ll need you and Tommy to wait in the alleyway while I go up to the kitchen alone.”

“Wilbur, I swear to Prime if this is just to see your boyfr–”

“It’s not! Charlie can go nab a health potion from Bad’s lab and bring it here. In the meantime, we can hole up for a while in Quackity’s room while Tommy heals himself up a bit. I just need time to get Quackity on board and make sure no one in the kitchen is going to see us enter.”

Tommy perked up a bit at the sound of that and his eyes fluttered open. A wobbly grin worked its way onto his face as he asked, “We’re meeting Wilbur’s boyfriend?”

He could feel Techno’s laughter as it jostled him all the while Wilbur’s face turned a light shade of pink. The brunette thumped the kid on the forehead and asked with false irritation, “How is it that even half-conscious you still are able to annoy me?”

“One of my many talents.” Tommy made an attempt to wink, but just ended up blinking deliriously at him. “Are you sure no one will see me?”

Wilbur shrugged. “If everything goes perfectly then yes. Once you’re a bit stronger we’ll take you to our Dad who can help you and your wings.”

“Your dad...” *The Emperor*. Tommy shuddered. “Is he...nice?”

Techno chuckled, “He’s one of the most kind-hearted people I’ve ever met. Second to maybe Ranboo that is. He’s gonna love you, Tommy. There is nothing to worry about.”

“You thought we were protective? Our father is on another level of overprotective,” Wilbur added. Tommy smiled and the anxiety in his chest diminished just a bit.

Another wave of fatigue suddenly washed over him and before he could say anything else, he was out.

The next thing he knew he was in a slightly different alleyway but the rain was no longer as heavy as it had been. He felt much stronger than he had earlier.

“Techno? Wilbur?” He called as he pried his eyes open.

“We’re here kid, we’re almost there I promise. We’re just outside the entrance.”

Suddenly a surge of wicked energy filled Tommy.

“Techno...?” Tommy asked innocently.

“Mhm?”

“So exactly how down bad is Wilbur for Quackity?”

Techno busted out laughing as Wilbur’s face turned beet red.

“Oh my gods,” Techno rasped through hysteric wheezes. “Incredibly so. Primes, you’re my favorite kid ever. Thank you for that.”

With that, Techno descended back into laughter all the while Wilbur huffed in annoyance. “Are you done?”

“Not even close. Go tell your boyfriend we’re on our way in and that he should get some blankets and first aid ready.”

“I hate both of you,” Wilbur growled.

“Uh-huh. Sure.”

With that Wilbur ran out into the rain, flipping them off beforehand. Once he was out of sight, Techno pressed himself against the wall, letting the overhang of the roof shield the two from the rain. He slid to the ground with Tommy still wrapped up in his arms.

For a while, the two were quiet with only the sound of thunder rolling in the distance and Tommy’s labored breathing to fill the silence.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Techno asked lowly after some time had gone by, his head tilted towards the sky. His braid had long since fallen out of place and instead of trying to fix it back, he’d just put it up into a messy bun. Tommy saw Crow’s head peak out from the fur of Techno’s hood. She stared thoughtfully at him almost as if she too was wondering what his answer would be.

Tommy pressed his face into Techno’s chest, refusing to make eye contact as he admitted, “I didn’t know if I could trust you. I was scared.”

Techno let out a hum, clearly deep in thought before he asked, “Even after you’d seen our wings?”

“I didn’t know what to think after that. I wanted to trust you but I was worried I was being naïve. So I lied.”

Techno’s brow furrowed and he frowned, “And you were in pain this entire time?”

Tommy shrugged nonchalantly and began to pick at his nails. "It's nothing I'm not used to."

The concern on Techno's face only deepened. Finally, he let out a sigh. "You really are something else, kid."

"I'll take that as a compliment," Tommy shot back with a smile.

"Your brother..." Techno started and Tommy tensed a bit in Techno's hold. The pink-haired man seemed to be mulling over something in his mind before finally he gave Tommy a small smile and said, "He's not all you have."

"What?" Tommy stared back, confused by what the man was saying.

"Earlier you said your brother was all you had. That's not true anymore. You have us now." *Oh.*

And there it is.

Something in Tommy's resolve finally cracked at the words. It was like someone had taken a pair of scissors and snipped away a large chunk of the strings that tethered himself to Dream. The part that made him so overly dependent on him that he was sure he wouldn't be able to live without him.

But with each string gone, a new one took its place. These strings weren't dark and corroded like Dream's. They were pure and light. And instead of the new strings connecting Tommy to Dream like they always had, he felt himself tether to the bond he had with Wilbur and Technoblade. He clung to it like a lifeline. He clung to it as if it was his saving grace.

And a new thought echoed in his mind.

Do I really want to go back to Dream when this is over?

Tommy wasn't sure anymore.



“Quackity, there is someone at the backdoor who wants to see you,” Charlie whispered loudly as he entered Quackity’s corner of the kitchen.

The dark-haired man raised a brow at that. *Odd. I didn’t think we’d be getting more deliveries today.* He carefully set down the chicken he’d been stuffing for tonight’s dinner.

“Well, tell them to come in but warn them I’m extremely busy at the moment and won’t have much time to—”

“They said you need to come to meet them. He says it’s important.” His ward had a rather impish smile on his face as he rocked on the balls of his feet.

“Charlie,” Quackity sighed and rubbed his temples. “This better not be a prank. I really need to finish preparing supper. I still have to make His Majesty’s dinner after this.”

“It’s not a prank! But um...you should wash your hands.”

Quackity eyed the boy suspiciously and then sighed and removed his apron, setting it down on the table. He went over to the kitchen sink and scrubbed the stuffing off of his hands. He’d have to forgo making the dessert tonight. One of his staff would have to attend to it in his stead. The thought made his nose scrunch up in displeasure.

He was about to open the back door when he turned to see Charlie who had hidden himself away under the table. Quackity chuckled at him, “What are you doing?”

“Waiting for you to leave so I can go on a secret mission.”

Ok, that’s fucking adorable. He was less annoyed now. Quackity smiled. “I’ll be right back, Charlie. Do not touch the chicken.”

“I won’t.”

Liar.

Quackity rolled up his sleeves and adjusted his beanie and walked out the back door. It was still raining but not as bad as it had been before. He peered around the area and frowned when he found no one there. The dingy excuse of a courtyard was as empty as ever. Not even the cats that would sometimes lurk around the bins looking for scraps of food were here.

He tilted his head. Had the person left? Or had Charlie lied and pranked him? Quackity walked farther out, eventually stepping out from the awning and into the rain.

He felt his shoe sink into a mud pile and frowned. *Wonderful.*

Quackity was about to abandon the stranger in favor of cleaning the mud from his boots when suddenly a familiar voice whispered in his ear, sending a shiver up his spine, “Hey there, Q. Did you miss me?”

Quackity whirled around and pushed back against the man. He stumbled back a few feet and froze at the sight of the brunette grinning back at him with a smug look.

Wilbur.

Relief flooded through him first, then rage, then relief once more. The man looked like he’d been through hell. He was drenched head to toe and covered in dirt, minor scrapes, and bruises. His crimson eyes still radiated with fondness as he looked at Quackity, who still wasn’t sure if he wanted to hug the man in front of him or kill him. He decided to do whichever came first.

“*You,*” Quackity growled and marched up to the taller man. He stood on his tiptoes and grabbed Wilbur by his necktie, yanking him down to his level. They were nose to nose and Wilbur’s face had turned an almost comical shade of pink. He composed himself quickly though and gave the man a Cheshire grin. Wilbur’s eyes flitted downwards teasingly and Quackity was just about ready to punch the Prince of the Antarctic Empire square in the jaw.

Quackity didn't give in to the embarrassment and instead growled, "Wilbur August Watson, you are the most *insufferable* man I've ever had the misfortune of knowing and if it wasn't for Charlie I would strangle you myself and *gladly* face the consequences. Do you know how difficult it is to focus when the entire castle is in a frenzy searching for you idiots? I fucking *despise* you."

Wilbur's eyes narrowed deviously and he smirked. "You've got a real interesting way of showing your disdain for me, Q. If I didn't know any better, a moment ago I would've thought you were about to kiss me."

Quackity's ears were definitely burning now, he pushed the man's face away with his hand. "You'd like that wouldn't you, *Your Highness*."

Wilbur didn't respond but the look in his eyes spoke volumes. Instead, he just smiled at the man and said in a soft tone that made Quackity's stomach flip, "I missed you too, Quackity."

Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you.

Thankfully for the sake of Quackity's pride, Wilbur was the first to cave as he pulled the man into a hug. Quackity immediately melted into it and held him tight for fear he might fly away again. He could feel Wilbur's chin sit atop his head and internally cursed himself for being so short.

They stood there together in the rain for a long moment perfectly content to be in the presence of the other. Quackity had never felt so relieved to see Wilbur's dumb fucking face.

Eventually, Wilbur pulled away though Quackity could see plain as day that he didn't want to. The two were practically drenched from the rain and Quackity could feel his teeth chatter.

"As much as I'd love to continue this, I did come here first for a reason," Wilbur said, joy still shining in his eyes. At least until he looked past Quackity and towards where the alleyway was. His expression grew worried, almost guilt-ridden as if he'd forgotten something.

"With that reason being...?" Quackity let the question hang, searching his eyes.

His gaze snapped downward to Quackity's and he placed a hand on his shoulder. "I need your help with something. Techno is a few blocks down and um...well we--ah...there's a kid with us. His name is Tommy and he's hurt pretty badly. I sent Charlie to Bad's to get a health potion but I need your help and to ask if you will let us hide him in your room, at least until we can get a potion in him."

"O...kay? You just found a kid during your mental breakdown trip? How old is he?" Quackity asked, concerned and confused about why Wilbur and Technoblade wanted to smuggle a child into the castle.

"He says he's eighteen but I'm pretty sure he's only fifteen or sixteen. He's also very...paranoid. Which is why I need your help to make sure nobody sees him until we get his situation under control."

"What situation? And where are Ranboo and Tubbo?"

Wilbur huffed and grabbed one of Quackity's hands, squeezing it gently as he pleaded, "They're fine. But listen to me, as much as I'd love to answer every single one of your questions in excruciating detail, Tommy's in pain. A lot of pain and I *need* to get back to him and Tech. Please, Q. Trust me?"

Quackity stared at him for a long moment. He was *scared*. *He was scared for this kid*. Quackity could already see that he cared deeply for him. What the hell had happened while they were gone?

Quackity nodded and squeezed back. "Okay. I trust you."

Wilbur smiled and pecked a swift kiss on his cheek. "I owe you big time, Q. Just block off the hallway and find some towels and first aid okay? I'll be back."

Quackity placed his hand against the cheek, feeling it burn red as the prince ran off. He shook his head with a smile.

"*So did he kiss you yet?!*" A voice called out from behind him and Quackity whipped around to see Charlie grinning smugly at him from the doorway, potion in one hand and a small pouch of silver in the other.

“You knew?! You little shit! You set me up for that!” Quackity ran in after the boy who squealed as he was chased down by his guardian.

“Techno?” Tommy stirred, his bones felt like lead as exhaustion seeped through him. His eyelids drooped and he could feel himself begin to lose his hold on consciousness. The hybrid tilted his head down towards him and let out a hum.

“Will you tell me a story? It’s getting hard to stay awake now.”

Techno sat up a little, shifting Tommy upwards in his arms a bit. His heart panged at Tommy’s weak voice but he nodded. “Sure kid, what kind of story do you want?”

“I dunno. Tell me something about you or give me blackmail over Wilbur.” Tommy’s head lolled a bit as he peered up at him. Techno gave a small chuckle.

“Okay...hmm...something about me or Wilbur. Oh, I know. Did you know that Wilbur can sing?”

“Is he any good? Because I can also sing but I’m shit at it.” Tommy smiled.

“He’s very good. He can also play guitar.”

“Do you think he’d play me something?” Tommy asked and Techno’s eyes softened.

“He doesn’t normally play for people but I think he’d make an exception for you.” Techno nodded, his voice gentle.

“Wil’s such a softie. What about you? Do you play anything?”

Techno thought for a moment and then answered, "I play the violin."

"Poggers. We should play together one day. I've always wanted to hear a violin." Tommy's vision was blurring again but he fought hard to keep himself afloat.

"I'll make you a deal, Tommy. If you stay awake, I'll even let you pick the piece."

"You've got yourself a deal, Big T." Tommy weakly reached his hand up and grabbed Techno's. He shook it as best he could before letting his arm flop back down. Techno didn't let go.

The sound of footsteps running toward the two jerked him awake. Techno stood to his feet, careful to mind Tommy's wings as he shifted him again in his arms.

"Wil?" Techno called out and a voice replied immediately from a bit far off.

"This way! Quackity's waiting for us!" Wilbur called and Tommy turned his head to see Wilbur waving at hand at them in the rain. Techno followed after him and it didn't take long for them to catch up. Tommy saw Wilbur look down at him with a furrowed brow and a worried smile. He grabbed one of his hands and asked, "How are you feeling, kid?"

"My bones hurt," Tommy replied flatly and then smiled at Wilbur's puzzled expression.

A thought flitted across his mind as Wilbur held his hand in his own; The twins were so affectionate towards him lately, especially Wilbur. It was as if they knew just how touch-starved he actually was. Or maybe it was just because he was dying or something and they felt bad. Was he dying? He wasn't sure. Though it did feel as if his wings were getting their revenge by charring every single one of his organs.

Primes, will somebody sedate me already?

The sounds of voices vaguely registered in his head and suddenly he didn't feel the rain anymore. *Weird*. He tried to focus, but his head was pounding and he couldn't keep his eyes open anymore.

“Tommy? Tommy, can you hear me? I need you to drink this, okay?”

That's a familiar voice. Why do I know that voice? Oh, that's Wilbur, innit?

There was the cold press of glass to his lips and Tommy instinctively drank the nauseatingly sugary sweet liquid. His face scrunched up in disgust as he growled, “Ew, what the fuck is this shit?”

“Oh, he's not dead. That's good.” Now that was definitely a voice Tommy did not recognize. It was much too childlike. Fear shot up his spine as he tried to open his eyes.

“Easy kid, it's okay. It's just Charlie here with us. Nobody else.”

Tommy furrowed his brow. He couldn't remember if he'd heard that name before or not. His gut twisted as he felt the effects of the potion begin to take effect.

His back burned even hotter as it was forcibly sewn back together in a way that felt almost violating to him. It wasn't as smooth and painless as his magic was. This shit *hurt*. Tommy groaned.

“Shh...it's okay, Toms. You're gonna be alright.” It was Wilbur again. Tommy finally found the strength to open his eyes to find himself sat up in Wilbur's arms, his back leaning into the man's chest. He was in a decently large room with simplistic furniture and two beds, one was smaller than the other and had what looked like a stuffed animal of a slime sitting atop a green blanket.

Beneath the bed, he saw a pair of bright green eyes peering out at him curiously. *That is a child. That is a small, very puntable-looking child.* He weakly lifted up a hand to wave at the boy.

Slowly but surely he began to feel his strength return to him until finally, he was able to sit up on his own.

“Think you’ll be able to heal the rest yourself?” Wilbur asked, scooting to the side so he could face him. Tommy nodded but then looked back at Charlie warily.

“He won’t tell anyone, not that anyone would believe him,” Wilbur snorted and Charlie narrowed his eyes at him. He didn’t really feel like arguing about it so he simply placed his hand against his back and summoned his magic to his fingertips. The bones of his hands, spine and the roots of his wings began to glow.

Charlie’s eyes widened but he didn’t say anything as he watched with fascination from under the bed. After a minute or two, Tommy turned to Wilbur and asked, “Where’s Tech?”

“He’s just outside talking to Quackity. He’s fine.”

As if on cue there was a knock on the door. Techno and a man with dark hair, tan skin, and a beanie entered the room. Quackity.

And then Tubbo entered as well.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Wilbur sputtered and Tubbo gave him a shit-eating grin.

“Ditched the guards the moment we got back to the castle. Ranboo caused a distraction so I could run for it. I had a feeling you guys would be down here and I wanted to see if Tommy was okay.”

“We all know you’re just hiding from Schlatt, Tubbo,” Quackity scoffed and then ruffled the boy’s hair. The man turned to Tommy with a smile and greeted him, “Hello, Tommy. I’m Quackity, it’s nice to meet you.”

Tommy looked him up and down for a moment and then eyed Techno behind him who smirked at him. With that, Tommy replied, “Hello Wilbur’s boyfriend.”

Wilbur thwacked the back of his head while Techno and Tubbo snorted with laughter. All the while Quackity stared at him with an unamused expression.

“It’s not too late to throw your ass back outside, twerp,” Quackity shot back and Tommy flipped him off.

“Wilbur, he’s bullying me,” Tommy whined dramatically and saw Wilbur rolling his eyes.

“You’re both terrible.” Then the man patted him on the back and nodded. “Go ahead and finish healing yourself, Quackity’s trustworthy.”

“He literally called me a twerp and threatened to chuck me outside like two seconds ago,” Tommy argued.

“That’s just how he makes friends.” Wilbur grinned and Quackity threw a pair of socks from the floor at his head. “See?”

“Ugh, fine.” Tommy huffed and summoned his magic again. This time he pressed a hand to each wing and crossed his legs so he could focus. He grinned when he saw Quackity suck in a breath as his eyes went wide.

He sputtered, “U-uh... W-What... What the fuck? *Why is he glowing and why can I see his bones? Tubbo. what did you do to him?*”

“I’m fuckin’ awesome that’s why,” Tommy declared proudly.

“Why does everyone always assume it’s me when something weird happens? Tubbo complained while Techno elbowed him in the side and smirked.

“It’s because *it is you* ninety percent of the time.”

Tommy winced when he felt his powers reach their limit for the time being. Tommy looked down at his wings. A good portion of his feathers had grown back in but they were bent and overlapping. His primaries were much too small. He’d need to spend more time healing them later.

“I’ll fill you in on it later, Q. Don’t worry,” Wilbur swore and he saw Quackity return the promise with a soft smile. *Ew, love.*

“I think that’s all I’ve got in me for now. I can heal up better later on. Let me see if I can retract them.”

Wilbur immediately placed a hand on his back. “Let’s...not. You need to keep your wings out for a while, Tommy. Otherwise, you could tear again. Just hide them underneath my jacket for now and later we’ll find you a cloak or something.”

Tommy’s stomach flipped uneasily at the suggestion and he could hear Dream’s voice in his head. **Don’t listen to him. Put your wings away, Tommy. It’s too dangerous.**

Wilbur’s right though. It is safer for me to keep them out. If I’m not careful I could permanently injure myself. I can’t rely on my powers for everything.

So reluctantly, Tommy agreed and shrugged Wil’s trench coat back on, this time he made sure Crow wasn’t hiding in his scarf. She wasn’t. Instead, Crow was currently lounging in Techno’s hood which seemed to be her new favorite place. It was soft. Tommy could understand to an extent.

Tommy saw Wilbur eye Techno nervously. The pink-haired man nodded and Wilbur sighed, “I guess...I guess it’s time to face Dad and Schlatt.”

“Tubbo, If you die, can I have your duck plush?” Charlie teased from underneath the bed. Tommy choked back a laugh.

“*You keep your grubby little child hands off of Benson,*” Tubbo hissed humorously and Charlie stuck his tongue out at him.

The rambling turned back to Wilbur. “I can already see my life flashing before my eyes. This isn’t gonna be pretty,” Tubbo mumbled, earning a sympathetic pat on the back from Quackity.

“You dug your own graves.” Quackity shrugged and then turned to go and pull Charlie out from under the bed.

“Gee thanks,” Wilbur responded in a blank tone. “Any idea where Phil is at the moment?”

“Last I heard, he was in the library.” Quackity turned to Tubbo and pointed at him. “Your father is in his office.”

Tubbo winced. “Yeah no. I’m sticking with you guys for now. Maybe with Phil around, I’ll at least have a chance.”

“That’s assuming he doesn’t kill us first,” Techno argued.

“So should I be planning funerals or...? I’m starting to wonder if this is still a joke,” Tommy laughed nervously.

“In theory, it’s a joke.” Tubbo paled. Tommy stared at the boy with a concerned expression. At least until Techno interjected.

“Alright, stop freaking the kid out. Tommy, do you think you can stand?”

Tommy shrugged. “Only one way to find out, I suppose.” Wilbur grabbed his hand and helped pull the boy to a shaky stance. He released him but kept an arm close in case he needed to catch the blonde if he fell.

“I still feel pretty weak but I can walk,” Tommy affirmed and the brunette nodded in response. “Okay, just let me know if you start to wobble.”

Techno opened the door to Quackity’s flat and peered into the hallway, looking for any sign of anyone who might see them. If they went out of the servants’ hall they could take a passageway up to the Library.

“It’s clear. Let’s go. You first, Tubbo,” Techno said, giving the ram a push. Tubbo glared back at him but didn’t argue as he walked into the hallway.

Tommy saw Wilbur turn to Quackity and whisper, “I’ll see you later?”

Quackity grinned but his cheeks were pink. “If you survive then sure.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes and gently wrapped an arm around Tommy’s shoulders, nudging him forward. Before they left Tommy called out, “It was nice meeting you, lover boy!”

“Fuck off and die.”

This time even Wilbur couldn’t contain his laughter.

Chapter End Notes

No I will not apologize for the sheer amount of TNTduo in this chapter. *passes out from illness*

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I’m also on twitter, tumblr, tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

I’ll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

And We Will Find a Way Home

Chapter Notes

Hi guys<3 So uh, my lovely editor @arbitersart has a message for you.

Good morning. I'm writing this note because Emi will be way too nice with it, and I am mean.

This chapter of TGP took a little longer than usual. Emi got a lot of notes asking if TGP was discontinued after a measly week. First of all, y'all would not last a second in 2014 ff.net era. I've been waiting for my favorite fic to upload for 6 years but I'll be caught in a clown suit dead in a ditch with my bare ass out before I go hollering in the comments about it. Second, oh my god get a life. Do not bother Emi when he's prioritizing his health, you fatherless ingrates. You aren't paying them shit, they're sharing this fic with you out of the kindness of their heart. Every time you leave a comment pressuring Emi to update, I take another day to edit the next chapter. You have been warned.

- Arbiter<3

Enjoy the Chapter! - Emi

Word Count: 7.1k

TW: None. Unless you count Arbiter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Phil could feel his mind slowly decay little by little as he read through yet *another* correspondence from a disgruntled business owner that had decided to start fighting with another. This time it was because they couldn't decide where their land ended and their competitors began.

Perks of being the Emperor:

The feud between the two had resulted in several letters to the Emperor arguing over the borders of their land and Phil was *this close* to tearing his hair out. After twenty years of resolving petty conflicts like these, Phil could feel his mind starting to wear from it.

He let his head thud against the hardwood desk and shoved the papers to the side. He needed a break.

He didn't want to think about deeds and claimants anyway. It was as exhausting as it was tedious. He was tired of pretending he cared. Phil just wanted to know where the hell his kids were. It had been two days.

Of course, it wasn't like the twins had never been away from home before. Techno often made long trips out with Puffy to study under the command of the Captain. And Wilbur just three weeks prior had returned home from a diplomatic conference out west. But he'd always known where they were. He didn't know now.

Phil had left his office earlier, needing a break from Schlatt and his moping. It had been getting to that point in the day that Schlatt was eyeing the whiskey bottle in the cabinet in the corner lustfully and Phil was not about to let Schlatt wring him into another night of sad alcoholism.

So now here he was, sitting in the library with a pending migraine threatening to ruin the rest of his day.

There was a knock at the door. Phil thudded his head against the table again.

"Puffy, I told you, you don't need to check on me every five minutes! I'm perfectly fine," Phil yelled without looking up from another document.

Phil heard the door open and huffed in annoyance.

"Oh my gods," Phil muttered under his breath, aggravated. He turned to snap at her and felt his heart drop at the sight before him.

Wilbur stood at the doorway.

Phil stumbled up from his seat, nearly knocking over the chair. He stared back at his son and felt a wave of pure blissful relief wash over him. He took in a deep breath and thanked his Goddess for returning their sons to him.

“Wilbur,” Phil said softly, he clasped his hands together feeling the sweat build up between his palms.

Wilbur took a few steps forward and then Techno entered the room after him. However, the younger did pause to whisper something to someone outside the door.

Not that Phil thought to wonder who he was talking to. It was as if every trouble had been washed away the moment he saw his eldest. Techno and Wilbur were home. His sons were home.

Thank you, my love. Thank you.

Techno shut the door and without hesitation shoved Wilbur forward towards Phil.

“Don’t be a little bitch,” Techno barked, his face glinting with rather uncharacteristic mischief.

“Twat,” Wilbur hissed back at him and Phil had to hold back a laugh.

As much as he just wanted to hold his sons tightly in his arms they were still in so much trouble.

Phil straightened himself upright and crossed his arms. Finally, he spoke sternly, “You are both so incredibly grounded.”

“Dad, we’re twenty-two,” Wilbur stated, within arms reach of Phil.

“And I’ve never done a wrong thing in my life. This is unfair punishment,” Techno added.

Phil grabbed Wilbur by his face and glared. “Does it look like I care how old you shits are? *Grounded.*”

Wilbur snorted and then leaned into the touch. He sighed. It was clear there was so much he wanted to say but couldn't figure out how to.

His eldest looked down at him with sad eyes and spoke in a small voice, "I don't hate you, Dad."

Phil felt like the weight of the world had fallen off his shoulders as he pulled his son into his arms. Wilbur clutched onto him tight and buried his face into his shoulder.



Wilbur murmured tearfully, "I'm sorry, Dad. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean it, I swear."

Phil carded his fingers through his brown curls and sighed. "I'm sorry too. But you scared me half to death. Both of you did."

Phil pulled back a bit and stretched an arm out to Techno. "You're responsible for my heart problems as well. I'm guilting you into this."

"Crafty old man," Techno retorted but gladly joined the hug.

Phil finally felt whole again. Well...almost. There would always be two empty spots in his heart where Kristin and Theseus should be.

Wilbur pulled back first and took a moment to wipe his eyes. He smiled. "There's someone we want you to meet, Dad."

Phil raised a brow. "Oh?"

"Calm down, Tommy," Tubbo soothed. He grabbed his hand and squeezed it gently.

"Step into my shoes for a moment and see if you wouldn't shit yourself," Tommy hissed back in response. "I've been living in isolation for most of my life and I'm about to meet the Emperor of the Antarctic Empire, Tubbo. I think it's fair for me to be a little nervous."

The castle was like nothing he'd ever seen before. It was huge. Not to mention fancy as fuck. Wilbur constantly had to tug him forward when they'd been sneaking to the library because Tommy kept getting distracted by something new.

I can't believe I've been traveling with fuckin' Aristocrats.

They were standing outside the door of the library waiting for Wilbur and Techno to finish talking with their father. Somehow, they'd manage to take a few secret passages Techno knew of and snuck past the guards in order to end up where they were now.

"Fair enough," Tubbo said. "I suppose I too shit myself when I first met the Emperor, though to be fair I was six months old."

Tommy shoved him with a grin. "Gross. You know that's not what I meant."

"You're overthinking it, Toms. Phil's a good guy, you'll be fine," Tubbo assured.

If only you knew.

While he was grateful that Wilbur had protected him from having to tell Tubbo and Ranboo the truth about Theseus' necklace, a part of him wished that they knew. Perhaps some of the guilt boiling in his chest from the weight of the pendant in his pocket would abate if he knew Tubbo didn't scorn him.

But maybe Wilbur would keep the truth from his father. Maybe Tommy was worried over nothing. He truly hoped that was the case.

"How are your wings doing? I didn't get to ask earlier," Tubbo asked after another minute of silence. Tommy frowned and felt the appendages twitch instinctively beneath Wilbur's coat.

He managed to regrow most of his primaries, but he'd need to preen his wings before he dared to attempt another heal.

"They're fine. Mostly they just feel...cramped right now. It's odd having them out this long." Tubbo's expression dropped and Tommy realized the error in his sentence. *Shit.*

“How...How long do you...what? They’ve been out for maybe four or five hours, what do you mean? Do you ever take them out?” Tubbo looked pale as if he was afraid of Tommy’s answer.

Tommy’s shoulders slumped. His mouth opened but no words came to him. So he stayed quiet and hoped the silence spoke for itself. Tubbo stepped towards him, looking rather worried for him.

“Tommy...” Tubbo began but Tommy cut him off.

“Don’t. Trust me, I know. I know it’s bad. I didn’t...I-” Tommy swallowed. He dropped his head and then spoke, “Can we not talk about this? Please?”

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up. Tubbo nodded solemnly and replied, “Sure thing, bossman.”

Before anything else could be said between the two boys, the door opened and Wilbur appeared. He smiled at Tommy and stretched out his hand. “Come on, before the old man dies from curiosity.”

“I heard that,” A deeper yet gentle voice retorted from inside the library. Tommy bit back a laugh and took Wilbur’s hand, letting the prince lead him inside.

As soon as he sets foot into the library, his eyes widened in amazement at the sheer number of books he saw in front of him. It was more than he could ever hope to read in his lifetime. The library was *massive*, with a raging hearth surrounded by posh-looking furniture that one could practically sink into. Tubbo tapped his shoulder and Tommy turned a bit to see the most beautiful grand piano he’d ever seen in his life.

To be fair it was the *only* grand piano he’d ever seen. His fingers twitched instinctively as he longed to hear what sound the keys would make. Before he could daydream any further, he felt Crow ruffle her feathers as she stirred from her nap. She chirped once at him then flew off without another moment’s hesitation.

She landed on the shoulder of a middle-aged man with kind blue eyes and blonde hair, a bit darker than his own. He wore an emerald circlet atop his head, identical to both the twins’ earrings and Theseus’ pendant, which felt ever heavier in his pocket. His hair was a bit shorter than Tommy’s

and was tied back with a rubber band. He was dressed in a rather fancy green tunic and dark pants. *A bit casual for a king.* Tommy thought.

The man was eyeing him with a thoughtful expression as if he wasn't quite sure what to make of Tommy. In his defense, Tommy wasn't sure what to make of the Emperor, either.

He was at a loss for a greeting until he saw Crow nuzzling into the man's shoulder. A retort left his lips before Tommy could stop himself. "Do I mean nothing to you anymore, Crow?"

Wilbur snorted back a laugh while Tubbo failed to reign in his own. Even Technoblade was suppressing a smile. Crow squawked almost smugly at him from Phil's shoulder and Tommy frowned. Phil didn't react in the slightest. He continued to stare at Tommy as if the mere sight of him burned him.

Tommy shifted uncomfortably and squeezed Wilbur's hand as a cry for help.

"Dad?" Wilbur prodded and that seemed to finally jolt Phil from his thoughts.

"Hmm? Oh, my apologies," Phil stammered, still looking somewhat shaken. The man wrung his hands for a moment before he took a step towards Tommy and his expression finally warmed as he smiled. "Hello, Tommy. I've heard quite a bit about you from Wilbur and Techno. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Tommy felt himself shaking as he bit out randomly, "...You're not as old as I thought you would be, Philza Minecraft. I mean you are old but I thought emperors were supposed to be ancient."

Phil looked bewildered for a full minute while the twins and Tubbo struggled to keep it together. Tommy knows he should definitely *not* have called the Emperor "old" but *goddammit* he was *stressed* and humor helps him cope.

Eventually, Phil spoke but not before sighing tiredly, "Oh for fuck's sake he's just as bad as Tubbo and Ranboo."

Wilbur let go of Tommy's hand so he could slap a hand against Phil's shoulder. He grinned. "Oh no, Dad. He's *worse*. His chaos knows no bounds."

Tommy took the reprieve and *rolled with it* as he nudged Tubbo in the side. "Hear that, Tubs? Wilbur thinks I'm more feral than you."

Tubbo's expression didn't budge but his eyes glinted with unspoken chaos as he echoed, "I can change that."

"You scare me sometimes, big man," Tommy responded, gently patting the teen on the shoulder.

"And that is the difference between you and me, Tommy. For I fear nothing."

As if on cue, the door behind them busted open causing Tommy to nearly jump out of his skin at the sight of a man maybe Phil's age standing in the doorway looking rightly *pissed*. If Tommy had to describe him simply, he would say he looked like an older version of Tubbo. His brown hair, goat-like ears, and horns were the same. The only difference was the side chops and reddish-brown eyes that were glaring daggers at Tubbo.

Looking closer, however, Tommy could see overwhelming relief within them as well. If Tommy had to guess, this was Tubbo's father.

Tubbo grabbed Tommy's arm in terror and whimpered, "Oh goddess save me."

"You still fear nothing, Tubbo?" Wilbur teased but Tubbo ignored him to rasp one final message to Tommy as his father closed in on him. "Remember me, Toms. *Tell my story*."

Tommy gave him a mock salute as his father, who didn't pay the blonde a second glance, grabbed Tubbo by the ear and dragged him unceremoniously out of the room. Tommy bid Tubbo farewell, "It's been an honor, Tubbo Underscore."

"Welp...hopefully we'll see Tubbo again...in the next year or so," Wilbur said offhandedly.

“Is he going to be okay?” Tommy asked, slightly worried. Wilbur bumped his shoulder with a smile.

“He’ll be fine. Schlatt was just worried. He’s very protective over Tubbo.”

Tommy nodded but he couldn’t help but be slightly envious of the fact that Tubbo had such an attentive father.

“So, Tommy.” Phil took a small step towards him, his eyes warm as he asked, “Wilbur mentioned you were having an issue with your wings. Is it okay if I take a look at them?”

And there it is. Tommy chewed nervously against the inside of his cheek. Already the image of Phil’s pleasant expression morphing into one of judgment was seared into his brain. He’d seen the same look in Quackity’s eyes earlier. A look that screamed, *“How could you have let them get that bad?”*

I didn’t have a choice.

“Tommy?” Wilbur’s voice drew Tommy from his thoughts, and he sighed, already knowing what the man would say next. “You can tr-”

“Trust him? You say that and I know you mean well but I...” Tommy cut himself off with a sigh. “I’ve already broken all the rules. Every last one. This isn’t easy for me, Wilbur. It’s the hardest thing I’ve ever done in my life.”

Tommy’s nails dug into his wrist as he continued. “It’s not that I don’t want to, I just don’t know if I can. I didn’t want Quackity or Charlie to see but I didn’t have a choice. Nor did I with you. I want to trust you more than anything, but it’s hard to trust when you’ve lived the life that I have.”

The room was quiet for a long moment until eventually, Phil stepped forward and his hand hovered over his shoulder tentatively, before deciding against it. Tommy shifted nervously but Phil’s voice was gentle and quiet as he spoke.

“I don’t know much about you, Tommy, and I won’t pry if you don’t want me to. If you wish, I can merely assess the damage and that can be it. But I won’t force you to show me them if you don’t want me to.”

“Dad,” Techno warned but Phil shot him a glare. Tommy swallowed but felt a bit better. Crow squawked irritably on Phil’s shoulder.

Phil chuckled, “I guess she disagrees, but you have a right to your privacy.”

Tommy fiddled with his hands and looked over to Wilbur who looked like he wanted to argue just as much as Techno did. But Phil sounded so genuine, and he was so tired of fighting. He was just... so tired.

“You already know they exist, so I suppose there isn’t a point in hiding them is there? But fair warning, they aren’t pretty.”

Phil nodded in understanding and Tommy averted his eyes as he carefully took off Wilbur’s coat, trying his best to avoid jostling his wings. He wordlessly handed it to Wilbur as he waited for the other shoe to drop. The room was silent as Tommy turned around so Phil could see the full extent of the damage. They might look a little better now after healing them up a bit but Tommy knew they were still quite a shocking sight.

When Phil didn’t say anything, Tommy turned his head to look at him from over his shoulder. Phil’s jaw was clenched tightly, and his expression harshened considerably. Whether or not it was directed at Tommy, he wasn’t sure.

“Yeah, I know. They look like shit,” Tommy mumbled and wrapped his arms tightly around himself.

The anger he saw in Phil’s eyes made him shudder. The emperor took a deep breath before he gritted out, “Oh, *mate*, who did that to you?”

Tommy shook his head. “What do you...? I did. I did this to myself.”

“You had to have been in *so much pain*, Tommy. It would take months of neglect for them to be in a state like this. How?” Phil asked, trying to control the steadiness of his voice.

“You said I was entitled to my privacy, remember?” Tommy smiled, but there was no emotion in his voice. His eyes were blank and weary. Phil’s face dropped.

Suddenly Wilbur hissed, “It was him, wasn’t it? Your brother. Did he force you to keep them in? That fuckin’ bas-”

“*Wilbur*,” Phil scolded and Wilbur snapped his jaw shut with a harsh clack of his teeth. “I won’t have any arguing from any of you. Tommy’s wings should be the priority right now. The rest of this can be saved for later.”

He turned to Tommy and asked, “Tommy, will you let me take a closer look at them so I can see the extent of the rot?”

Tommy nodded, albeit a bit reluctantly. Phil led him over to the fireplace where there was a spot on the floor surrounded by blankets and throw pillows. A perfectly comfortable reading nook for a rainy day.

He took a seat on the floor and immediately grabbed one of the throw pillows so he could hug it tightly against his chest. He felt Phil sit behind him and then Wilbur and Techno both on either side. Tommy side-eyed Wilbur briefly before deciding to bury his face into the pillow.

“I’ll be as gentle as I can, Tommy. Tell me if you want me to stop or if I’m hurting you, alright?” Phil requested softly and Tommy immediately nodded into the pillow.

“Words, Tommy.” Wilbur poked him.

Tommy reluctantly pulled his face out of the soft cushion and replied, “Yeah, okay.”

He tensed instinctively for rough hands to grip and pull at his wings but all he felt were gentle fingers brushing with near-perfect precision through his tattered feathers. He instantly melted back into his pillow, feeling all the muscles in his shoulders and back loosen until he was once again slumped over on his pillow.

If anyone noticed the way Tommy's spine had essentially compressed into slime, nobody commented on it, something which Tommy was thankful for. *I could die right now and be happy. My back doesn't hurt.*

As he relaxed against the pillow he could hear Phil, Wilbur, and Techno lowly talking to one another.

"I've never seen scarring like this...It's as if his wings have regenerated over and over again and created a thick layer of scar tissue. And yet somehow new feathers still grow in? How the fu..." Phil gaped, astonished by something that seemed truly impossible. "And the bones as well... they've been broken in several places from what I can feel but they're still perfectly aligned?"

Phil turned to look at his sons who were trying their best not to spill the beans. Tommy snorted from where he was peeking out at them. Eventually, Tommy lifted his head up to slur tiredly, "I'm simply built *different*."

"How the hell are your wings still attached to your body? The rot is extensive and it's not even recent! Not to mention the older wounds..."

"Easy. My bones glow." Tommy grinned at Phil's puzzled expression. He saw Wilbur smirk at him out of the corner of his eye.

"Are you sure he's lucid?" Phil asked, turning to Techno who snickered to himself.

"For the most part, he might have a loose screw or two rattling around in that head of his." Techno shuffled forward so he could tousle Tommy's hair, causing it to fall in front of his face.

"Phil, is it okay to commit junior regicide against Techno?" Tommy asked. And Phil had to pause his ministrations to eye him oddly.

“Are you sure you know the meaning of that word, Tommy?”

“Course I do. Regicide means to kill a king, which is why I said *junior regicide*. Which means I get to punt Techno out a window,” Tommy answered sarcastically.

“Tommy, don’t defenestrate me. That’s rude and traumatic for Chat,” Techno replied, seemingly unbothered by Tommy’s threat against his life.

Who the fuck is Chat? Tommy thought to himself but was too cozy to raise his head and ask.

Phil broke down into small light laughs as he continued to preen Tommy’s feathers. The man grinned. “Okay, I see what you mean now, Wil.”

“*I told you,*” Wilbur replied in a sing-songlike voice. He scooted closer to Tommy and placed the end of one of Tommy’s wings into his lap to preen. Eventually, Techno did the same with the opposite wing.

“I am dangerously close to passing out on this pillow. My body feels like gelatin.” Tommy tried and failed to bite back a yawn as his body sagged with exhaustion.

“Good. Goddess knows you need the rest. I can’t even begin to imagine how fucked your spine is from your wings constantly being in your back. I’m glad we can provide some relief though,” Phil soothed in a soft voice that only further dragged Tommy down into an involuntary slumber.

“Don’t wanna sleep. I gotta fix up my wings...” Tommy whined to Wilbur who gently placed a hand on his cheek for Tommy to lean into.

His voice was almost melodic as he spoke, “Phil’s fixing them, Tommy. You rest, okay?”

“Fuckin’ traitor.” Tommy turned his head to Techno. “Techno you said I was banned from sleep. Save me.”

“Ban revoked, squirt. I’m not worried about you dying now, so sleep away.”

“Dying?!” Phil gasped and Techno turned to whisper something into Phil’s ear.

“I will stay awake solely to spite you,” Tommy grumbled and tried his best to sit up even though every atom in his body was begging him to sleep. *Nope. I’m gonna be a stubborn bitch on this.*

“Wil, I can finish off this wing, if you want to go knock him out,” Phil offered to which Wilbur grinned as he moved to sit in front of Tommy who was still trying to sit up. He grabbed the pillow out of Tommy’s lap and placed it into his own. Wilbur gently propped the boy up so that he was leaning against his chest.

This is a dick move.

“This is unfair,” Tommy mumbled into Wilbur’s coat though he made no attempts to move. Finally, Tommy sighed and briefly looked up at Wilbur to hiss, “You’re a fucking softie, Wilbur whatever-your-last-and-middle-name-are.”

Wilbur chuckled and replied, “It’s Wilbur August Watson for the next time you want to insult me, sunshine. Now sleep.”

“I’m torn between wanting to kick you for calling me ‘sunshine’ and wanting to make fun of you because your name is *Wilbur Watson*.”

“It was either ‘sunshine’ or ‘glow-stick boy’,” Wilbur said with a laugh.

“Wait...before I fa...ll...ugh what Techno’s middle name. I need it for science.”

“Don’t you dare.” Techno glared at Wilbur and Phil simply smiled as he continued to preen the boy’s wings.

Wilbur flipped him off. “This is for all the Quackity jokes. It’s Alexander, Tommy.”

“Heh, fuckin’ nerd,” Tommy said and finally allowed himself to fall into the warm envelope of sleep.

“I hate you,” Techno said, narrowing his eyes at him to which Wilbur simply shrugged with an impish smile.

“Is he out?” Phil asked, pulling out yet another undergrown red feather.

“Like a light.” Wilbur smiled, his eyes soft as he looked at Tommy’s sleeping face. He looked so peaceful and somehow much younger than he already knew he was. No way this kid was eighteen. He was sixteen at the most.

He was so...small. When Wilbur first met Tommy he thought the kid might shatter like glass at the slightest inconvenience. He was so jumpy and volatile. He constantly contradicted himself without even realizing it. Wilbur couldn’t tell if it was that he had a bad memory or had possibly been conditioned by Dream to not question him. Or both?

And yet, Tommy was one of the strongest people he’d ever met in his life. Despite his scrawny stature, the boy fought as hard as Techno did at times. He wanted to be taken as seriously as Ranboo and Tubbo. His stubbornness seemed to rival even his own but his compassion was as fierce as Phil’s. He was smart as a whip and yet he failed to recognize his own talents. In truth, Tommy’s sense of self-worth was practically non-existent, something that had become blatantly obvious when Tommy had thrown Techno his only weapon mid-fight leaving him defenseless.

The kid was reckless and self-destructive. And he wanted so desperately to be loved. Not that he’d ever admit it.

Wilbur sighed. *I want him to stay. I can’t let him go back to that life.* The overwhelming urge to protect the kid was something so familiar that it scared him. It was something he’d hoped he’d never feel again. It was too painful.

Tommy was painful, but Wilbur had never been more willing to be hurt in all his life.

“Do you see that?” Techno said maybe fifteen minutes after Tommy had fallen asleep in his arms. Wilbur brushed his fingers through his blonde curls absentmindedly.

“What?” Phil asked, his brow furrowed. Techno gently raised one of Tommy’s wings, careful not to jostle it too harshly since it was still sensitive. He pointed to a few feathers that looked as if they’d just recently budded.

“Those are his primaries. Earlier in the tavern...he didn’t have any. They’re growing back.”

Phil looked down at the crimson feathers and gently ran a hand over the small feathers, curiously. “How? How is that even possible? Ranboo’s wings never grew back after the damage they’d sustained. Feathers shouldn’t be able to grow back with scarring that deep. Why are Tommy’s?”

Techno and Wilbur eyed each other for a long moment before eventually, Wilbur spoke, “It isn’t our place to reveal why. Talk to Tommy about it. But...he’s a very special kid.”

Phil sighed but didn’t argue. He knew the twins were right to respect Tommy’s trust in them.

“I haven’t seen you this fond of a child since Charlie first arrived, and even then, he was always glued to Quackity’s side. Tommy’s different, isn’t he?” Phil asked while fiddling with one of Tommy’s loose feathers.

Wilbur looked down at Tommy and felt a small smile stretch across his face. He softly admitted, “It took me a few weeks to grow used to Charlie...but Tommy...we literally met him yesterday morning. He...” He cut off, unsure of how to word the connection he felt with Tommy.

“He seems like a good kid.”

“He is,” Techno inputted without looking up at either of them.

“And you two want to help him? See Theseus’s lanterns, that is.”

“That’s the easy part at this point. The harder part will be convincing him not to go back to his brother.” Wilbur frowned. He honestly hadn’t realized until now just how much he wanted Tommy to stay. He just seemed to fit so effortlessly into the weird collection of strays he called his family.

“Wilbur—”

“Dad, you don’t understand. You haven’t seen the signs that Tommy’s shown. He’s being abused, horribly. His brother kept him locked in a tower for *years*. He’s kept him weak so he’ll never be a threat, he forces him to keep his wings in, and has berated him into thinking that *he’s* the problem.”

“Even so, you can’t force him to stay. He’s allowed to make his own choices. We have no say in what he chooses, Wilbur.” Phil spoke firmly. “He spent years locked away in a tower, right? Imagine how he’d feel if we forced him to stay. We’d be no better than his brother.”

Wilbur’s head snapped towards Phil, and he hissed, “I am nothing like him. I would *never* hurt him.”

“That’s not what he meant, Wil. But Dad’s right that we can’t make him stay. It wouldn’t be right,” Techno added, still running a hand through Tommy’s wings. They’d long since finished preening, what Techno was doing was solely for comfort.

“You know, you both are really irritating when you’re right,” Wilbur said with a huff. Techno smirked back while Phil’s shoulders lightly shook with a laugh. Eventually, his expression dropped.

“We still need to talk about it. *All* of us.” Phil eyed Techno who was conveniently not looking at him.

Wilbur sighed, choosing to focus on the way Tommy’s peaceful expression would twitch every so often rather than the way his father was staring at him now.

“I’m not sure I *want* to talk about it, Dad.” Wilbur frowned.

Phil nodded but implored him anyway, “I know. But it’s better for us to talk about it rather than allowing it to hang in the air as tension. And especially not when Theseus’s birthday is so close. I’m not saying you have to forgive me. In truth, I’m not sure I want you to forgive me. But I’d at least like to know where the two of you stand now that you know what I’ve done.”

Wilbur looked up from Tommy and stared at his father for a long moment. His eyes were pained and weary. At that moment, Wilbur could truly see how time had taken its toll on his father. It wasn’t that he looked old, he just looked...tired.

Fine then, let’s talk about it.

Wilbur shut his eyes as he collected his thoughts before he vocalized in a low, careful tone, “In a way...I’m not sure it’s you I’m truly mad at,” The sentence broke off quietly, unfinished. His hand gently brushed through Tommy’s hair as he continued with a hard swallow.

“Theseus died.” Wilbur saw his twin flinch at the sentence. But the brunette went on, “He died... *after just four years of life.* He died because you didn’t tell us. He died because we were too young to tell. He died because I didn’t believe him. He died because Tubbo wasn’t in the room. He died because I didn’t comfort him when he had a nightmare. He died because you died. He died because Mom chose to save you. He died because Schlatt wasn’t fast enough. He died because you tried to protect all of us.”

Wilbur sucked in a breath. “Theseus died because I was weak.”

“I wasn’t strong enough to save him. I should’ve been quicker. I didn’t fight hard enough,” Techno muttered, looking down at the ground. He snarled, “Add that to your list of reasons why it was a fucking group effort.”

“But...maybe we could’ve done everything right. Maybe we could’ve been fast enough or strong enough. Maybe you should’ve told two eleven-year-olds that their little brother was going to die. Maybe we could’ve done everything right. *And maybe we still would’ve lost him.*”

Wilbur was crying now, silent tears trailed down his cheeks much to his dismay.

“The point is...we can't change what happened no matter how much we might want to. I've...
We've already lost Mum and Thes. I don't want to lose you too.

“I'm not mad at you, Dad. I'm just mad at the world that they're gone. And when you told me you knew he'd be taken...I thought that for a moment I finally had something tangible to take my anger out on. But I just ended up hurting the man who saved my life and gave me one worth living. I hurt you, Phil. And I'm sorry.”

Phil's eyes were filled with tears and he stared down at the floor. After a moment he rasped, “*Thank you, Wilbur.* I know as a father...I've made so many mistakes but neither of you were one of them. And if your arms weren't full of Tommy right now, I'd hug the life out of you probably.”

Technoblade notably scooted back, and Phil laughed. “You're not off the hook either, Techno.”

His brother smirked but kept his gaze on the floor. “Don't expect me to be as sappy or dramatic as Wilbur was with his apology. Not that I feel I have anything to apologize for other than not leaving a note.”

Phil nodded and gently patted his younger son on the shoulder. “Are you angry with me? You have every right to be.”

“I think Chat might melt my brain if I say yes. They like you more than me after all.”

Philza shook his head. “You're entitled to your own feelings, no matter how much Chat might feel they have a say in them. I want to hear you, not them.”

Techno nodded, still refusing to look up. “I...I don't know, to be honest. When Wilbur told me, I tried to be logical about it. Chat had cut me off, so it was easy to push away my own anger. I understand why you didn't tell us. Wilbur and I were children and we didn't need to have something like that looming over us...” He paused and Wilbur noticed that his fists were clenched tightly.

And yet his face was expressionless as he said, “It's as I told Wilbur. We are all one another has left, right? I don't want to be bitter about it. I'd rather never think about it again. I just want to accept that he's gone so that every time I see a painting or hear someone tell a story about him I can

look back on my memories with him and smile. I'm done being weighed down by grief. So no, I'm not angry Phil."

Phil placed a hand on Techno's shoulder. Techno didn't meet his eyes, instead, he moved over a bit so he could lean his head against Phil's shoulder, a rare gesture that surprised even Wilbur.

The room lapsed into a warm and comforting silence as Techno pulled out a book to read while Phil sat in one of the armchairs, focusing on his work. In the meantime, Wilbur had set up a large pillow to lean his back against while Tommy slept peacefully in his hold. He didn't dare move the kid, not when it was so obvious, he needed the sleep.

Wilbur smiled. He was more than happy to guard Tommy's sleep. He deserved the rest. *Goddess knows he's earned it.*

"Ow. Ow. Ow, Dad! Okay! *Okay!* I get it! I'm sorry! I'm already missing half my face and I'm rather attached to this ear." Tubbo winced as his father dragged him down the hall for all to see. Which in all fairness, he probably deserved.

He could see the guards attempt to stifle a smile as he passed by. Schlatt came to a stop and let out a huff. He let go of his ear but refused to meet his gaze. Instead, he spoke in a dark tone, "Follow me."

Tubbo squeaked but followed him dutifully to his father's office without question. The two made their way down the hall in silence and once they'd arrived Schlatt opened the door and gestured Tubbo inside.

Tubbo nodded and stepped inside the room. He squeezed his eyes shut as he braced himself for the scolding of a lifetime.

Instead, he was met with silence. After a moment he peeked his good eye open to see his father staring at him, with worry. The anger had disappeared, and relief had taken its place.

“Dad...” Tubbo began but Schlatt shook his head and sucked in a breath. His voice was still low, but it was calmer now. “Are you hurt?”

Tubbo shook his head.

“Then what the hell were you thinking?” Schlatt hissed and Tubbo hung his head low. *There it is.*

“I-” Tubbo began but Schlatt cut him off.

“You’re *sixteen*, Tubbo! You’re a child. *You’re my child.* Do you know how many enemies the Emperor and I have?” Schlatt was yelling now and pacing around the office.

Tubbo stood still and hugged himself tight as he answered, “I know but—”

“Clearly not!”

Tubbo felt his own temper flare as he snapped, “I can handle myself! I’m not weak! I might be smaller but I’m not made of fucking china, Dad!”

Schlatt snapped his head towards Tubbo and spat, “That’s not the damn point, Tubbo! The point is you’re a target and second, you’re a reckless child who went out in the fucking woods *alone. It doesn’t matter how many of your inventions you carry with you. All it takes is a marksman’s arrow and you’re gone.*”

“And yet, I’m still here. I took care of *myself. Ranboo and I saved Techno and Wilbur!*”

Schlatt froze. “You were attacked?!”

Tubbo winced. He hadn’t meant for that to slip. “Technically it was the princes’ who were attacked. Ranboo and I just happened to stumble across them right when they needed us most. Which means I was right to go after them and I won’t apologize for it!”

Schlatt took a moment to take a deep breath and set his hand on the desk so it could clench painfully tight around the grain. “Tubbo, that is dangerously naïve. You could have been killed, or held as ransom. There are cruel people in this world, people who have no problems with torturing information out of children. The four of you are far too important to risk your life like that. And that ambush proves it.”

Tubbo shook his head in anger. “You don’t get it.”

“No, I do. Phil and I wanted to do the same thing. But it doesn’t make it okay. If it weren’t for Puffy we would’ve been out there searching for you.” Schlatt’s tone softened and he moved to stand in front of Tubbo. “But this is a lesson you *need* to understand.”

Tubbo stared at the floor and Schlatt sighed. After a few minutes of silence, he asked, “Your invention, the one that fires metal. Did you have to use it?”

The young ram frowned and wrapped his arms around himself. He spoke quietly, matching his father’s tone, “Y-Yes.”

Schlatt nodded, his expression far away for a moment before it returned and he placed a hand on his shoulder, looking at him directly. “And are you okay?”

He knew what his father was asking. *Are you okay with the fact that you blew off the heads of two people? They may have been the scum of the earth but at the end of the day...they were people. And you killed them.*

“T-They were bad men. They tried to kill the Techno and Wil...I did what I had to do for my kingdom, right?” Tubbo’s voice sounded like a ghost and the words felt dry in his mouth.

“That’s not what I asked, Tubbo,” Schlatt said, a bit stern.

“I know...It’s just, I don’t have an answer. I just knew if I didn’t they could’ve been killed. I don’t regret it and I’d do it again if I had to. It’s just...they were people. Living, breathing, people who probably had loved ones...and I...” Tubbo’s voice wobbled a bit on the last word.

“Son, look at me,” Schlatt ordered and Tubbo looked up at his father. Tubbo could pinpoint the *exact* moment when he saw his father’s façade of anger and disappointment melt away as his expression softened and his resolve failed. Tubbo practically fell into his father’s arms, hiding his face into his shoulder as silent sobs wracked through him. He felt Schlatt’s hand against the back of his head, cradling it while his other arm was wrapped around his shoulders holding him tight.

“Shh...It’s alright, kid. I might be mad but I understand why you did it. It’s gonna be alright. You shouldn’t have had to do that. Not ever. You’re just a child.”

“I’m sorry, Dad. I’m sorry I scared you.” Tubbo sniffed and he could feel his Dad press his face into his hair.

“You really did scare the hell out of me. And while you are so very grounded...I’m just glad you’re okay.”

With that reassurance, Tubbo felt like he could finally breathe again. He was home. His family was home. His father understood and all was well again. As Tubbo hugged his father he turned his head to look at the large bookshelf behind his father’s desk.

One of those books has to contain something about Logstedshire.

A new objective was set and Tubbo was ready to run himself ragged to find out if his suspicions were correct. He’d have to be careful when asking his father for the book, otherwise, he’d get suspicious. *Tomorrow then, I’ll ask tomorrow.*

Tonight he would search the library for anything about Tommy’s magic. Healing spells and potions existed of course, but nothing like Tommy’s magic which seemed to flow through him as richly as blood did. Surely there was something on it.

The more he got to know the boy, the more he became certain that he wasn’t simply seeing what he wanted to see. Theseus and Tommy were so similar, both in appearance and in some aspects, personality. Anyone who didn’t see it, which was everyone except him to be fair, were so deep in denial that they simply could no longer see what was right in front of him.

Or maybe Tubbo was just smarter than them. *Yeah, that sounds more plausible.* His father pulled away and ruffled his hair fondly. Tubbo smiled.

Tomorrow begins the hunt for the truth about Tommy.

Chapter End Notes

4/4 4/4 4/4 4/4

He's home;-;

OK THIS IS IMPORTANT BC IM TIRED OF ANSWERING THIS QUESTION.

Why didn't Phil recognize Tommy?

In Chapter 1 when Phil sees vision Tommy it is said;

"It was the youngest prince again, but now much older, maybe fifteen or sixteen. He couldn't see his face, but a stream of blood was trickling down his chin."

He never saw Tommy's face. And another thing. Phil had that vision after he fell through the portal so 1000 years went by and then another 20ish to get to present day.

I'm not saying that nothing about this kid rings a bell to him. Clearly there's something familiar about him but they're all too blind in their own grief to truly see it. Also, Tommy was nearly 5 when he was taken and he's shown 0 sign that he recognizes him.

So in conclusion, PHIL DOES NOT RECOGNIZE TOMMY RAAAAHHHHHHH

Update #2: So I actually updated Ch.1 a bit and changed a bit of dialogue to hopefully explain this better.

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

Also consider following me on Instagram for more art! @_emiartse

I'm also on twitter, tumblr, tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

It Has to Be True

Chapter Notes

Hellooo everyone! Happy New Year! I hope you all are having a wonderful holiday<3

TW: Panic Attacks

Word Count: 6.8k

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart<3
<https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

ON ANOTHER NOTE. ARBITER MADE ME A WHOLE ANIMATIC ABOUT TGP FOR CHRISTMAS!!! GO WATCH IT RN!!!

<https://youtu.be/0e9fh6BahTw>

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As the sun rose into the sky, light shone from the high beam of the library into Tommy's eyes, causing him to groan and shift further into the warmth of the comfort below him. He spent a moment trying to blink away the sleepiness of his eyes. He yawned tiredly but felt the strong urge to curl back into the warm blanket of sleep fade quickly. But when tried to sit up, he felt an arm snake around his back and tug Tommy back against their chest.

Tommy looked up and felt his face burn as he saw who was keeping him from sitting up. Wilbur. The man was sound asleep and his glasses were askew on his face. He looked around and found that the two were still on the floor, though it seemed Wilbur had propped up two large pillows for him to rest against. Why the man had allowed Tommy to sleep through the entire night with him being pinned as a pillow beneath the teen, Tommy could not understand.

But apparently, Wilbur hadn't had a problem with it because now he refused to let Tommy go. His hold on him was tight but not painful, if anything it made Tommy want to give up and just accept his fate and go back to bed. *Who would've guessed Wilbur was so clingy?*

From behind him, Tommy heard someone chuckle warmly. He turned to the noise and found Phil sitting in an armchair looking at the two rather fondly. The man smiled. "Are you stuck, mate?"

"Just a tad. Wilbur's got a death grip on me," Tommy whispered and Phil laughed quietly. He set his bundle of paperwork to the side and stood. He gently pried open Wilbur's arms, allowing

Tommy just enough room to slither out.

“Hand me that pillow,” Phil asked, eyeing a rectangular throw pillow. Tommy obliged and had to stop himself from laughing when Phil slid the pillow into the now Tommy-less space. Wilbur hugged it tightly, content with the decoy.

Tommy stood to his feet and said, “Thanks. For a second there I was worried I might not make it out alive. You’ve saved my life, Philza Minecraft.”

Phil grinned and gently ruffled the boy’s hair, much to Tommy’s surprise, and apparently Phil’s too. He stared at his hand for a moment looking rather shocked, and then retracted it and quickly apologized, “Sorry. I should’ve asked before I did that.”

“It’s okay. I don’t mind. I suppose I’m just not used to this much physical affection yet. My brother isn’t exactly the *warmest* person.”

Phil looked a bit sad at that but then quickly quickly recovered to say, “Oh, well then allow me to remedy that.” He then proceeded to tousle his hair again causing Tommy to giggle.

Looking behind the man Tommy noticed another figure also sound asleep. Techno was sprawled across the couch with his hair covering his eyes. One of his arms was also hanging limply off the couch.

“You guys slept out here? All night?” Tommy asked, a bit shocked. Phil nodded.

“Wilbur was worried if we moved you to the spare room you would wake up alone and get scared. So we decided we’d just crash here. The boys seemed almost as exhausted as you had so they were out not long after you.”

Tommy felt his heart warm at the gesture. No one had ever watched over him like that before. Not even Dream. Not even when Tommy was so ill from his wings that George would wonder if he’d make it through the night.

“He’ll be fine, George. Tommy always bounces back. Stop worrying.”

Tommy swallowed down the lump in his throat and choked out, “Thank you.”

Phil looked puzzled at that and quirked his head to the side in an almost eerily bird-like manner. He asked, bewildered, “What are you thanking me for?”

“For caring.”

Phil looked like he might cry at that and Tommy winced apologetically. He opened his mouth to speak but Phil cut him off, “Tommy if you even think of apologizing for that. I will definitely cry or hug you. Or both.”

Tommy snickered but Phil looked rather serious about that threat so he nodded. “Sorr—*oh right*—erm...” Tommy trailed off and awkwardly scratched the back of his neck, unsure of how to respond.

Phil sighed and placed a hand on his shoulder. “Suddenly I’m beginning to understand why my kids got attached to you so quickly.”

Tommy grinned deviously. “Must be my charming personality and clever wit.”

“No, it’s because you’re traumatized as fuck,” Phil retorted and then looked over his shoulder to something by the entrance of the library. Tommy turned and snorted back a laugh when he saw Tubbo passed out at a table cluttered with books. “Why don’t you go wake him before he drools all over his work.”

“Will do, Philza Minecraft. Will do.” With that, Tommy bounced off and missed the way Phil chuckled to himself over the fact that Tommy most likely didn’t know to refer to him as ‘Your Majesty’.

Phil made a mental note to stop anyone who tried to correct him. It was far too endearing.

When Tommy went to shake Tubbo awake he found himself pausing when he took a look at the multiple books lying open in front of them. Each and everyone seemed to contain information on either healing magic, hybrids with regenerative abilities, and strangest of all a book on mythological creatures. The page it was opened to was a section about phoenixes.

“So you’re The Golden Phoenix, eh?” Purpled’s voice echoed in his mind. *Why had he called me that? Phoenixes are made from fire and are immortal.*

Tommy was many things, but immortal was not one of them. Tommy guessed the only reason Tubbo had this book out was because of their regenerative abilities, which to be fair, did sound awfully similar to his own abilities. But Phoenixes couldn’t heal others and they were birds. Tommy wasn’t really sure he was understanding Tubbo’s logic behind this one. He snapped the book shut which caused Tubbo to jolt awake.

“Wakey wakey, loser. I’m here to annoy you,” Tommy said with a grin.

Tubbo peered up at him sleepily and flipped him off before burying his face into his arms once more. “Tubbo’s not here right now. Please try again later.”

Tommy hopped up on the table, careful not to disturb any of his chicken-scratch notes, and poked him a few times. “Glad to see you’re not dead.”

“If only I were so lucky,” Tubbo sighed and then sat up. “Dad grounded me from my lab for a month. Death sounds more preferable a punishment in my opinion.”

Tommy winced. “Damn, that’s harsh.”

“You’re telling me.” The ramling leaned back in his chair so he could stretch out his limbs much like a cat. He then smiled at Tommy. “You seemed rather cozy last night. I’ve never seen Wil quite so happy to be a pillow before.”

Tommy felt his ears turn red and he tucked a wild strand of his hair behind his ear. “I’m surprised I slept that long. Normally I wake myself up a few times.” *Nightmares.*

“You looked like you needed it and they seemed more than happy to watch over you. You’ve really got Techno and Wilbur wrapped around your finger. I haven’t seen them this protective of someone since...” Tubbo cut himself off jarringly, almost as if he literally bit his tongue to stop himself.

“Since?” Tommy raised an eyebrow, confused.

Tubbo waved him off. “Don’t worry about it. I’m just glad to see them smile. It’s been a while.” Tommy stared down at the ground, embarrassed. *Surely he’s just exaggerating.* “So uh, what’s with the books?” Tommy asked, effectively changing the subject.

Tubbo shook out his own hair a bit awkwardly and replied, “It’s nothing. I was just curious about your powers is all.”

“Did you find anything?” Tommy thumbed through the pages for a book on ancient healing spells or something weird like that.

Tubbo sighed, “Nah. Everything just led to a dead end. Turns out, you’re just really fucking weird, dude.”

“I always knew I was one of a kind,” Tommy joked and Tubbo punched him playfully on the shoulder.

“Boys,” Phil called, grabbing their attention. The man smiled as he asked, “Why don’t the two of you head down to the bakery and grab something to eat? I’m sure Niki could use some extra hands this morning.”

Suddenly Tubbo cursed under his breath. “Crap. I forgot I told Dad I would eat breakfast with him this morning.” Tubbo looked over at Tommy and smiled cheekily. “Why don’t you go with Wilbur? You might get to see Niki strangle him.”

“I heard that,” Wilbur grumbled sleepily from where he was still on the floor. He stood to his feet and stretched out the sleep from his bones. He quickly eyed Tommy and snorted back a laugh.

“What the fuck are you laughing at?” Tommy growled and the man walked over to him so he could ruffle his hair causing Tommy to hiss in retaliation.

“Your hair. It looks like a bird’s nest.”

“True. I wasn’t going to say anything but it is sticking up in some places.” Tubbo grinned, causing Tommy to scowl at both of them.

“My hair is my defining feature, and I will not have either of you slandering it.” Tommy crossed his arms and frowned.

“Relax, I think it looks rather *cute*. It does make you look younger though. So, if you’re still trying to pass for eighteen I would fix that.” Wilbur grinned and Tommy gasped in pure offense.

“I am *not* cute. I will kill you.”

“Says the boy who was making flower crowns two hours after we met him,” Techno said from the couch.

“Correction. I will kill all of you,” Tommy growled. He heard Phil laugh from the couch where he was currently trying to fix Techno’s hair.

“Even me? I didn’t even say anything.”

“You have never done a wrong thing in your life, Philza Minecraft. You will be the only survivor,” Tommy said proudly. Phil snorted in response.

“Alright, c’mon. I’ve got a set of old clothes you can borrow, the pants might be a little long but you can just roll them up. I’ve also got a cloak for you. It’ll fit better I think than my jacket,” Wilbur laughed.

“Oh! Tommy, as I said earlier we do have a spare bedroom you can sleep in. There’s an adjoining bathroom for you to freshen up in. No offense but you are practically covered in dirt and grime and I’m not sure Niki would appreciate you tracking mud in her kitchen,” Phil said walking over to the two with Techno trailing behind him. The man looked over at Tommy and gave him a soft smile.

“Good morning, half-pint,” Techno said, his eyes soft. “You look like you’re feeling much better today.”

Tommy nodded but said nothing more than that. He’d rather not get into his wings this early in the morning. Instead, he asked, “Are you coming with us, Tech?”

He shook his head. “*Nope*. I need to go meet with Sam this morning. I’m sure he’ll put me through the workout of my life for running off after Wilbur. I’d rather get it over with now.” Techno moved closer so he could rest a hand on his shoulder. He gave him a small smile. “But...you should drop by later and say hi. I’m sure Sam would love to meet you. He’d be quite intrigued by your weapon of choice.”

“Will he let me wack him with the frying pan?” Tommy grinned eagerly and Techno snorted.

“Only if you can catch him,” Techno said with a wink. With that he walked off, stopping briefly to poke Tubbo in the side causing the ramling to laugh and smack his hand away.

Once the door had shut, Wilbur slung an arm gently over Tommy’s shoulder and grinned. “C’mon, kiddo. Let’s go get cleaned up before we scare the maids.”

The two sauntered off leaving only Phil, Tubbo, and Crow, who seemed more than content to stay on Phil’s shoulder. After a moment Phil tilted his head to look at his godson and asked, “So...what do you think of Tommy?”

Tubbo beamed. “He clicked with me and Ranboo so fast it almost feels like I’ve known him for *years*. And seeing him with Wilbur and Techno...” Tubbo trailed off for a moment and then said softly, “He’s brought some light back into their eyes and that’s invaluable.”

Tubbo turned to face Phil and his voice lowered as he asked, “And what about you? What do *you* think of Tommy?”

Phil lowered his eyes to the ground for a long moment, deep in thought. Eventually, he raised his head to say, “I don’t know if I can answer that…”

Tubbo frowned. “Why not?”

The emperor’s expression was unreadable but there was deep emotion laced in his voice as he answered, “Because I’m terrified that I’m wrong.”

“You know, Wilbur. When Phil said you were letting me stay in the spare room, I was expecting something a little less…fancy?” Tommy’s eyes were sparkling as he took in the grandeur of his lodgings. He was grateful that the room wasn’t over-the-top ginormous (It was definitely bigger than his bedroom) but the balcony seemed a little excessive.

The room contained a desk, a wardrobe, a couch, and an armchair. Not to mention a fireplace of his own and a rug that sat in the middle of the room that Tommy thought looked as comfortable as any bed. Speaking of the bed? *Oh my fucking god*. It was huge. And Tommy was slightly worried he might sink into the mattress if he laid on it. The pillows were fluffy and the blanket seemed as soft as silk.

He felt Wilbur laugh at his side. “Well, this is a palace after all. And you are our guest. Any guest of the Emperor or his sons deserves a room as nice as this one.”

“I haven’t done shit to deserve it. I did force you to bring me here after all,” Tommy said, feeling shame well up in his chest. Wilbur smacked the back of his head, playfully.

“Hush. You’ve promised to return his necklace and I trust you will.”

Tommy chuckled and looked up at Wilbur, his eyes almost shining “You trust me?”

“I do,” Wilbur said with such sincerity that it almost made him want to cry. *Almost*. “Tomorrow, Techno and I will show you all the wonders L’manburg has to offer during my brother’s festival. There will be music, dancing, and food. The entire city will be decorated for the occasion. From what I hear it’s the best party of the year. The palace celebrates as well but I think you’ll much prefer the peasant festival. The people loved Theseus and this is their day once a year to show it.”

“You don’t have to do this...” Tommy said, his voice suddenly sad and Wilbur shook his head in confusion.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a party for your little brother.” *It’s also my birthday, strangely enough*. Tommy frowned. “You should be with your family. I know I made you promise to let me see the lanterns but I never would’ve asked if I’d known who you were or what the lanterns met. I don’t deserve to have your attention on a day that special—”

He was about to continue when Wilbur cut him off.

“*Tommy*. I’ve spent the last eleven years of my life absolutely *miserable* on Theseus’s birthday. I’m more than happy to spend it helping you achieve your dream. I think Theseus would want me to be happy on a day like tomorrow, don’t you agree?” Wilbur set a hand to his shoulder and then bumped his chin with his hand so he looked up at him.

Tommy gave a reluctant smile. “I guess so. But shouldn’t you be with your father at the lights ceremony?”

Wilbur shook his head. “Techno and I have never been able to bring ourselves to be there and Phil has never asked us to. To be honest, I think if we were there it would just be more painful for him. Tech and I have our own little special ceremony during it. And we want you to be with us this year.”

“What ceremony?” Tommy asked and Wilbur smirked coyly.

“You’ll just have to wait and find out. But no one gets a better view of the lanterns than we do.”

Tommy smiled but everything in him screamed that he had no right to intrude on something so personal. He felt his hand twitch at his side. He should give back the necklace. *He needed to*. He didn't deserve such kindness. He didn't deserve *them*. How could he bring himself to steal Theseus' day when he had also taken something so precious from the dead prince as well.

Wilbur said that Theseus would have liked him. He doubted it.

"Alright, go get cleaned up kid. I had your clothes laid out on a table in the bathroom. Yell if you need me, okay?" Wilbur said. All Tommy could bring himself to do was smile and nod. Wilbur left and Tommy could feel the mental breakdown on the horizon.

So instead of dealing with *all of that*. He threw himself into the bath and set the water so hot it nearly burned him.

Afterward, his skin felt raw from scrubbing at it just a tad too hard. But the sooner he got the feeling of Dream's words scraped from his mind, the sooner he felt he could relax at least somewhat.

He drained the water and tumbled out, nearly slipping on the marble tile. He dried himself off and threw on his clothes. A plain white long-sleeved shirt and a dark pair of pants with a dark grey belt to match. There was a pair of brown bracers to secure the loose fabric around his arms and a pair of fingerless gloves made of leather that Tommy loved the feel of. A dark red jacket with shorter sleeves went over the tunic with an even darker red sash to secure it. And then finally, there was a long dark blue cloak. It was about as long as Wilbur's trench coat had been though it was made of much lighter materials. It even had a brooch to secure it. It also had a hood, presumably to hide his golden hair when needed.

Tommy was thankful that the clothes provided as much warmth as they did. Despite it being a palace, the rooms were still quite chilly. But considering the castle rested on a snowy mountain he could hardly blame anyone.

The cloak was perfect, and Tommy would definitely need to thank Wilbur for the clothes. Though he had to admit they fit a little *too* perfectly to be Wilbur's hand-me-downs. *Bastards bought me new clothes. Of course, they did. Damn royals.*

He decided to forgo putting on the cloak till he saw Wilbur again. *And no, it was definitely not because he couldn't figure out how to secure the brooch.*

Once he was all suited he went to the mirror to try and fix up his knotted, wet hair the best he could. He looked at himself and grinned at how well the new clothes suited him. He wondered if Wilbur would let him keep them. Tommy looked around the bathroom counter for a brush and frowned when he didn't see one. He was about to go run and ask Wilbur when he spotted it on the lower shelf of the counter.

He reached down, taking his eyes away from the mirror to grab it. And when he stood back up he froze. His breath stuck in his throat and suddenly he was too afraid to even scream.

Dream stood behind him.

Or at least, it seemed to be Dream. It was definitely his green cloak but the white mask with a grin was unfamiliar to him. Though something about it stirred something inside him. Something terrifying.

“What are you doing, little brother?” Dream's voice felt ten times louder in his head and Tommy pushed himself away from the counter, petrified. He stumbled backward into a shelf and felt the contents on it tumble to the floor.

My wings. My wings. Wings. Wings. He can see them.

He tried to retract them. Even though he knew Dream had already seen them, there was no way he hadn't. But maybe he'd take it easier on him if he put them away.

“I asked you a question, Tommy.”

Tommy tried to answer but it felt like someone was choking him making it impossible for him to get out the words that would calm his brother. He felt his feathers snag against his skin and held back a scream as white-hot pain shot through his spine.

“You disobeyed me, brother.”

Finally, he found his voice. “No, no, no! I’ll never do it again. I swear. Don’t—*Don’t*.” He tried to retract, again and *again*, groaning as the pain continued to grow the longer he tried. His head spun while his vision tilted nauseatingly. Meanwhile, Dream continued to stare back at him soullessly from the mirror.

He felt hands against his shoulders and without thinking, Tommy recoiled violently from the touch. His back hit the wall and Tommy tucked his knees against his chest, trying to make himself as small as he could. His lungs burned from a lack of air but he doubted he could breathe if he tried.

All he could do was try not to cry. Crying made everything worse.

“...ommy... Tommy. Tommy! It’s me. It’s Wilbur. I need you to stop. You’re hurting yourself.” Lie. Lie. Lie.

“C’mon, blondie. It’s me. I’m right here. He can’t hurt you. Not here. You’re with me. You’re safe.”

No, no no—...wait... That’s not Dream?

Tommy shook his head and dug his hands into his hair, pulling at the still-sopping wet strands harshly. Not even a moment later he felt someone—*Wilbur*—grab his hands and gently untangle them from his hair.

“Tommy, it’s me. I need you to breathe. He’s not here. You’re okay. You’re going to be okay. Deep breaths. It wasn’t real.”

Eventually, Tommy’s vision began to blur and he relented letting out a tiny shuddering breath before feeling his throat close up again. Tommy looked down to see his hands shaking violently. He assumed the rest of him wasn’t faring any better since he could hear his teeth chattering as well. A hand was suddenly set atop his back, right above his wings and Tommy flinched.

It wasn't until he heard Wilbur call his name again, trying to pull him out of his head that he finally caved and let Wilbur in. He pulled the kid into a tight embrace and a small broken sound left him when he felt Wilbur bury his face into his hair. As the two sat on the bathroom floor with water still dripping against the tiles, Wilbur whispered soft assurances to the boy until eventually, Tommy could breathe again and he'd stopped shaking.

"*Wil...*" Tommy creaked, grabbing at his shirt for something—*anything* that could keep him grounded.

"You're okay, Toms. He wasn't real. *He wasn't real*. He can't hurt you anymore. I'm here." Wilbur murmured into his hair for what felt like the fiftieth time in a row. Finally, Tommy felt like he could speak without panicking.

"I-I...I saw him...I thought I—..." Tommy whispered and then tucked his face into Wilbur's chest, no longer caring if he felt guilty about it or not.

"I know...I know...but it wasn't, kid. He's not here. It's just your brain playing tricks. He can't hurt you here. I won't let him. I promise, Tommy. *I won't let him*," Wilbur assured him. And suddenly Tommy felt embarrassed that he'd reacted so dramatically.

He tried to apologize. "I'm—"

"*Primes, do not* apologize for *that*. You did absolutely *nothing* wrong. You can't control that, blondie."

"But I... You shouldn't have to..." Tommy began and Wilbur shook his head.

"It's not a bother to me at all. I'm happy to help."

Tommy's voice became small and vulnerable, "...*Why?*"

Wilbur pulled back and held Tommy's face in his hands, just like he'd done in the cave. But then they had been dying, now it only felt like Tommy was the one drowning.

“Because you are *you*. You are so *good*, Tommy. You have done nothing to deserve everything that has happened to you. And from your reaction to seeing a shadow in a mirror, I can assume it was pretty bad.”

“You don’t know that...” Tommy tried to turn his face downward but Wilbur wouldn’t let him.

“I know enough to know that you are hurting and you believe you’ll never be enough. You think you’re a burden to people and you hate yourself for it. Well, *fuck what you think. You are enough. You are enough to me.*”

Tommy’s face fell at the words. The words he’d always hoped Dream would say to him but never did. And yet Wilbur had. “No...don’t say that. I can’t...I can’t handle it...Please...”

Wilbur looked pained for a long time but eventually, he nodded and helped the teen up to his feet. He held Tommy tight for a moment before he pulled away a bit. “Okay. Okay, Toms. Do you want me to help with your hair?”

Tommy nodded solemnly though he didn’t look up at him. “I can’t...I can’t look in the mirror. I’m scared.”

“That’s okay. We’ll do it in your room. No mirrors required. Then we’ll go to Niki and get something sweet, okay?”

Tommy nodded into Wilbur’s side. “Is she nice?”

“I fully expect that you’ll become one of her new favorite people.”

“Okay...” Tommy nodded and pulled away from Wilbur. Wilbur led him into the main room and gently brushed the knots out of his hair. When he was done, he pulled away with a small smile.

“How does that look?”

“You tell me. I’m not looking.” Tommy rubbed at his arm anxiously and Wilbur frowned. “It looks great. Are you ready to go?”

“I guess so...” Tommy said, his voice small. Wilbur went to grab the cloak from the bathroom floor and silently pinned the brooch in place. Wilbur nodded and placed a warm arm around Tommy, hugging him a bit close.

“Okay, kid. Let’s get a move on.”

Niki’s bakery was located just outside the entrance to Quackity’s kitchen. Something Tommy hadn’t noticed when they’d first arrived at the castle, not that Tommy remembered much about that trip anyway. The two briefly passed by Quackity and Charlie, which led to both of the younger boys having to drag the two away from one another so they could get on with their day. As they’d left Tommy had given Charlie a notable wink to show they were on the same page. He had a feeling the kid would be good for chaos later on. At the very least, the interaction had brightened his mood a bit.

They left the palace and traversed a long gated walkway until Tommy saw a sign for the *L’Manburg Bakery* and despite the still strong scent of rain, Tommy could smell the bread and sweets from a mile away.

“Oh, my gods...” Tommy murmured and Wilbur let out a laugh.

“I know right? Niki makes the best pastries in all of L’manburg.”

The two entered the door of the bakery and a bell chimed signifying their entrance. Immediately a tall figure emerged from the back with a broom in hand and Tommy’s face lit up.

“Ranboo!” Without thinking, Tommy ran to pull the enderman into a hug which thankfully the teen eagerly reciprocated.

“Tommy! Gods, I’m so glad you’re okay.” Ranboo squeezed him tight and Tommy pulled away to beam at them.

“Good and well, enderboy.”

Ranboo leaned down to whisper, “How are your wings?”

Tommy gave a strained smile. “On the mend.”

“Ranboo, *was machst du?* Du solltest doch hinten den Boden wischen und...*oh...*” A young woman appeared from the back. She was of short stature and had shoulder-length pink hair tied into two half-buns. She wore an apron covered in powder and her expression softened significantly at the sight of Tommy.

“Hallo...” She said, waving at him.

But it’s Wilbur who spoke first, “*Niki*, my good and beloved friend. How are you? Well, I hope! Surely there are no hard feelings for me—” Wilbur was cut off as soon as he grew closer to Niki. Once in range, she grabbed the prince by the tie and her gaze became rageful.

“Erst läufst du alleine davon. Dann geht mein kleiner Bruder dir hinterher? Gib mir einen guten Grund weshalb ich dich nicht jetzt sofort erwürgen sollte?”

“Niki please forgive me. I don’t understand you when you’re scolding me in German. But I’m sorry regardless. I didn’t know the kids would follow me.”

“Ja, aber sie haben es getan! Mein Bruder hätte sterben können! Von dir ganz zu schweigen.”

“I’m *sorry!* Please spare me for Tommy’s sake.”

The woman turned to Tommy and her expression became gentle. She spoke again, this time in English, “Hello, Tommy. What do you think? Should I spare his highness?”

Tommy grinned and pretended to sigh reluctantly. “Unfortunately, yes.”

Niki grumbled but let the man go. She trailed back behind the counter and leaned behind it. “Well, if murder is off the table, then how may I help you, boys?”

“Well for starters, we’re here because I need to show Tommy the best pastries in L’manburg so he knows the taste of pure happiness and copious amounts of sugar. And...I’m here to convince you to free Ranboo for a day or two.”

“Flattery will get you nowhere Your Highness,” Niki scoffed.

“It’s not flattery, don’t undermine your own skills.” Wilbur shot back immediately, entirely genuine.

Niki narrowed her eyes suspiciously at Wilbur for a moment and then held up a finger and sighed, “I’ll set Ranboo free under one condition.”

Ranboo let out an odd excited chirping sound at the sound of freedom and their face immediately went red. “Whoops. Sorry.” Niki let out an amused chuckle and then looked at Tommy.

“I need an unbiased taste tester for a few new recipes I’m trying. Would you be up for that?”

“Like you even need to ask. *Hell yes.*” Tommy grinned, bouncing up and down in excitement.

Niki smiled at the boy’s enthusiasm and ushered him behind the counter. “Ran, you too. You have better taste than Jack.”

The enderman grinned and eagerly followed their sister while adding, “Jack could eat raw dough and be satisfied.”

“What about me?” Wilbur frowned and Niki eyed him harshly.

“Pastries are for those who don’t go running off into the woods on their own. Ranboo is a kid but you are a grown man. So *you* can sweep.”

Wilbur scoffed and grabbed Ranboo’s discarded broom from behind the counter. “You’re lucky you’re the only person who can get away with forcing a prince to do manual labor.”

“Quackity would disagree.” Niki smiled deviously and Wilbur’s ears turned red. The brunette grumbled, “Quackity doesn’t count.”

“*Simp!*” Both Ranboo and Tommy shouted from the kitchen, somehow already covered in flour.

“This is a low form of bullying and I do not appreciate it.” Wilbur frowned and moved to thwack both boys in the back of the head.

Tommy responded by making childish kissy noises at the man. Wilbur raised an eyebrow before lifting the boy up under his armpits into the air like a cat and letting him dangle for a moment.

“Oi! Fuck off. It’s not off the table that I don’t have rabies yet. I’ll bite you, fucker,” Tommy hissed, kicking his legs out to try and hit the man.

Ranboo snorted. “I don’t think air jail is going to work on him, Wilbur. It doesn’t on Tubbo.”

“No roughhousing in the kitchen. Put Tommy down,” Niki scolded, trying to hide her amusement.

Wilbur sighed but obeyed and lowered the kid to the ground. Tommy turned to glower at the man. “Bitch.”

“Child,” Wilbur replied triumphantly.

Tommy continued to frown until Ranboo tapped the boy on the shoulder and turned his attention away. They handed the blonde a small croissant-shaped pastry coated in powdered sugar. “This one is one of my favorites. It’s got chocolate in it.”

Tommy took the delicate looking sweet and gently bit into it. Heaven flooded his taste buds and he had to hold back a noise of pure enjoyment. “Oh my *primes*,” Tommy hummed with his mouth still full of chocolate.

The teen swallowed, his eyes sparkling as he turned to Niki. “Holy shit, that’s incredible. Did you make that?”

Niki shook her head and eyed her sibling. “Nope. That was all Ranboo.”

Tommy set down the pastry and clapped the Ender Prince on the back. “Dude, what the hell. I think part of me just ascended. That is *incredible*.”

Tommy’s hand lingered for a moment while the blonde continued to praise the enderling. When he pulled away, he briefly noticed a faint glow to his hand. Tommy frowned as he saw the bones of his hands fade from sight. Something inside him froze.

What the...? Did I just...?

“Tommy, you good man? Did it have a bad aftertaste or something?” Ranboo asked. It seemed that the hybrid hadn’t felt his magic, nor had anyone else seen it.

“No! It was amazing! Sorry...I don’t know why I...” Tommy trailed off for a moment, still distracted by the fact that his powers had triggered on their own.

His powers were definitely tied to his emotions but he usually had a tight grip on them. He’d never really had a problem with them going off accidentally before. Dream had suppressed that part of him *real quick*.

Is it because I'm not home? Maybe it's just the rush. Yeah, that sounds right. I just need to be more careful.

His powers tended to be way more effective if not used on himself. Things that could take him days to heal on himself could take only a couple of hours on others. And in some ways that were more dangerous than it was helpful.

Calm down, it was at most half a minute. After all, it's not like I healed anything.

“Tommy?” Ranboo nudged him, looking rather wary. Tommy shook himself out of his thoughts. He turned to see all three of them staring at him in concern.

“It’s nothing. Alright, what’s next?” Tommy asked, giving the best smile he could to stave off their worries.

It's fine. Nothing happened.

Everything is fine.

Tubbo could feel his hands shake as he stood in front of his father’s office door. He’d spent all night going over what he was going to ask while researching Tommy’s powers at the same time. And now that he was here? He could feel all that practice go down the drain.

The ramling took a deep breath. He had no reason to worry. As long as he didn’t arouse any suspicion to the real reason he wanted the book on Logstedshire, then he would be fine and his dad would never *ever* know.

Easier said than done. His father was a politician after all. He could smell bullshit a mile away and Tubbo normally didn’t have any reason to lie to his dad. He was a bit rusty.

The sound of his knock echoing again the fine spruce door sent another wave of anxiety through him.

“Come in.” He heard his father call and Tubbo took another deep breath.

I got this. For Theseus.

He opened the door and stepped into the room. His father raised a brow at him and Tubbo squeaked, “Hi Dad.”

“Tubbo,” Schlatt acknowledged, briefly looking up from his work to nod at him. “What is it? You didn’t explode anything, did you? I told you already if I even catch a whiff of gunpowder on you for the next month then you will not see that lab till the snow melts.”

The snow never fucking melts on the mountain.

Perks of living in L’manburg.

“No, no. Nothing like that. I just had a question is all,” Tubbo said. Schlatt’s expression softened and the man set down his pen.

Deep breaths. You can do this. Ranboo’s voice echoed inside his mind rather than his own. As it always did whenever he was anxious.

“I-uh...well I guess I’ll just get to the point. Have you ever heard of a town called Logstedshire?”

Schlatt furrowed his brow and looked to the side as if he was trying to recollect some lost memory. The man hummed, “I feel like I have. The name does sound familiar. Why do you ask?”

“Well, it’s just that Tommy– you know the boy who was in the library with us last night?”

Schlatt nodded. “The scrawny blonde kid, right? Phil mentioned him this morning.”

“Well, he...well-*I* was wondering if perhaps you knew anything about his hometown. Maybe in one of your records?”

“Tubbo, stop pinching yourself,” Schlatt said sternly, but with the same concerned look he saw from his dad more and more lately.

Tubbo looked down and saw his wrist was littered with tiny half-moons impressed in the skin. “Oops.”

“Are you feeling alright? You seem pale.”

“Right as rain, pops,” Tubbo lied with a small smile. Schlatt didn’t exactly look convinced. The man stood from his desk and walked around to the boy. He held the back of his palm against his forehead for a moment and frowned.

“Well if it's not that, then why are you nervous? Did something happen?” Schlatt asked. *Shit. Divert. Divert!*

“Guess I’m still wondering if you're mad at me,” Tubbo lied smoothly, ducking his head a bit.

Schlatt sighed and gently set his hands on his shoulders. “I wasn’t mad, Tubbo. I was scared. There’s a difference.”

He leaned forward to gently bump his forehead against Tubbo’s, causing the smaller ram to giggle. “There is nothing you could ever do that should ever make you feel like you should be scared of me. Do you understand?”

Tubbo nodded, nudging him back. “Yessir.”

Schlatt pulled away and walked over to his bookshelf. He waved him over after a moment.

“So, Logstedshire, right?” Schlatt asked, flitting his eyes over the numerous volumes. He selected one of the newer leather-bound books in his collection and briefly thumbed through the pages.

“That’s right. It’s an older town that most likely doesn’t exist anymore. I couldn’t find anything about it in the Library so I hoped you might have something.”

His father frowned. “It might take me a bit if it’s no longer on maps anymore, but give me till tomorrow and I *should* be able to find it. The name Logstedshire does ring a bell but it’s not a town I’m familiar with.”

Schlatt turned to his son and his eyes softened. “But I’ll let you know if I find it. Okay, kiddo?”

Tubbo beamed as a wave of hope flooded his chest. He pushed himself into his father’s arms out of excitement. “Thank you,” Tubbo breathed.

The older ram staggered, briefly startled by his son’s intense reaction but quickly righted himself as he wrapped his arms around the teen. “You sure you’re alright, kid?”

Tubbo pulled back with newfound energy and replied, “I’ve never been better.” Schlatt tousled the boy’s hair with a smile and nodded. “If you’re sure.”

The ram briefly eyed his work and grimaced. “I know I said we’d have breakfast but I am *swamped* at the moment...and...” Schlatt cut off, noting his son’s narrowed expression.

“Remember what Puffy said to you and Phil about skipping meals?” Tubbo warned and Schlatt paled.

“You wouldn’t *dare*.” Schlatt gasped and Tubbo grinned.

“I’m *your* son. *I think the fuck I would.*”

Schlatt sighed defeatedly, leaning his head back to look at the ceiling despairingly. “You are the devil, child.”

Tubbo shrugged. “You raised me.”

“That I did.” Schlatt shook his head and pinched the bridge of his nose for a long moment, looking as if he was questioning his life choices. Finally, he stood from his chair and walked to the door. He wrapped an arm around his son and said, “Fine, let’s go eat, you little shit.”

“Now consider this, father. A nice cup of coffee for your favorite son.” Tubbo raised his arms in gesture as they walked down the hall.

“You are an only child for a *reason*. Goddess knows I don’t need another genius child manipulating me into eating breakfast. One of you is more than enough. Second of all, you can't keep falling asleep in the library. No caffeine until you learn how to sleep like a normal person."

“Like you sleep any more than I do.”

Schlatt laughed, “Touché.”

“So?” Tubbo asked, looking foolishly hopeful.

Schlatt gave him a devious grin and enunciated firmly, “Decaf.”

Tubbo booed.

Chapter End Notes

Tubbo fr be like: dontbesuspiciousdontbesuspicious

(Translations for the Niki section:

Ranboo, what are you doing? You're supposed to be in the back mopping

and...

First, you run off on your own. Then my little brother goes after you? Give me one good reason why I shouldn't strangle you right now?

Yes, but they did! And my brother could have died! Not to mention you.)

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

No art for this chapter but consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on twitter, tumblr, tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

(Edit on 01/28/23: Pspsp in case some of you lovelies are wondering why chapters are coming out more slowly it's because I started my full time job! It is making it harder to balance things out but trust me when I say I'm always working on TGP. This book never leaves my brain lmao)

I'm Counting On You

Chapter Notes

wassup im very sleepy but lets do this shit

TW: None:D

Word Count: 7.4k

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart<3
<https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

ON ANOTHER NOTE. ARBITER MADE ME A WHOLE ANIMATIC ABOUT TGP FOR CHRISTMAS!!! GO WATCH IT RN!!!

<https://youtu.be/0e9fh6BahTw>

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Kristin's heart had never felt so full. Well, maybe once, but that was many years ago. Back when Theseus- *Tommy* still seemed so full of hope with his golden curls and toothy grin. Back when her eldest still thought fondly of her and never frowned at the mention of his absent mother. Back when Techno didn't seem so serious.

Kristin remembered the last time she'd seen her angel smile at her. As the two had stood over the twins, watching them rest peacefully one final time.

He'd smiled at her and said, *"Even after all these years, my life remains yours to keep."*

"I never wanted your life, Phil. I just wanted your love."

How she'd missed him. Even now as she perched atop his shoulder, content to rest there a while before going to check on her sons, she couldn't help but chirp at him.

Phil sat at his desk, working away as usual on some paperwork. A sight she'd seen many times. He quirked his head at her and raised a brow. "What? Did you not agree with his claim?"

Kristin assumed he was referring to the legal document in front of him. Phil rested his elbow atop his desk and rested his cheek in his palm as he looked at her. "I agree, I suppose. The border is clearly stated but it is a fifty-year-old document that hasn't been updated in *years*. It's likely many of its boundaries have become outdated since my waking. "

Phil sighed. "What do you think? Should we advocate that the claim should be renewed? Or do we assure its validity and dismiss the whole case?"

Crow squawked.

"Advocate for a new claim it is," Phil chuckled.

"Are you talking shop with what's-his-face's pet bird?" Schlatt's voice interrupted as the ram casually entered the room.

"I promise. But not for you. For Phil." Schlatt's final words to her from the night she'd left echoed in her mind. She ruffled her feathers at the wave of guilt that crashed over her.

"His name is *Tommy* . And for the record, she's giving better advice than you usually do," Phil said without looking up from his work, though the joking tone of his voice was clear.

Schlatt scoffed. "Glad my twenty years of service finally gets some appreciation around here."

Phil let out a dry laugh.

"So where is the little street rat anyway? My kid seems fond of him already."

Crow cawed at the name. And Schlatt raised his hands in surrender. Phil stood from his desk and rounded it. He leaned against it and shrugged.

"I could say the same. Wilbur and Techno seemed determined not to let him out of their sight last night. It makes you wonder what really happened to them out there. Or more so what happened to

Tommy to make them act that way.” Phil dropped his gaze a bit, deep in thought.

“What do you mean?” Schlatt asked.

Phil sighed. “Some of his mannerisms are just...alarming. From what I’ve seen he constantly walks on eggshells and gets really defensive if anyone asks why. He just...he reminds me a lot of how the twins used to act when they were little.”

Schlatt frowned. “Maybe that’s why Tubbo was asking about his hometown earlier then...”

The emperor raised a brow at that and Schlatt continued, “Tubbo had a question earlier. Have you ever heard of a town called Logstedshire?”

Crow’s head shot up at that. *Logstedshire*.

“Can’t say that I have. Why?”

“Tubbo wants to see if there’s an Atlas on it and the name does ring a bell.”

Logstedshire is real? Crow had always assumed Dream had made it up along with everything else. But if it’s a real place and it’s still there...

Kristin felt her heart flutter in her chest at the realization that there might be *proof* that Dream wasn’t Tommy’s brother. If there was an Atlas and the town had in fact been decimated, then perhaps there was a casualty list? Something solid.

Tubbo was a smart kid. If anyone could piece together the truth it was him. And if he was already asking about Logstedshire, then maybe he was catching on.

“Yeah, this is the one, I believe. It should have maps and such dating back at least fifty years,” Phil said and Kristin suddenly realized that he’d crossed the room to look at his bookshelf. He pulled out a thick, leatherbound book partially covered in dust. He brushed it off and handed it to the ram.

“Hopefully this is what he’s looking for.” Phil shrugged.

“Are you going to give it to him now?”

Schlatt shook his head and Kristin nearly cawed in disapproval. “He stayed up all night last night. If he’s going to be out and about tomorrow for the festival then he needs to sleep at least a little bit. I’ll give it to him afterward.”

Damn you, Schlatt. Damn you for being a sensible father. Kristin ruffled her feathers agitatedly and then huffed. *Fine, I’ll wait then.*

In any case, Kristin now knew she seriously needed to keep an eye on her godson. If Tubbo had already gathered up this many pieces then he could be closer to figuring out the truth than she’d previously thought. Unlike the rest of her family, Tubbo wasn’t as blinded by grief. Ever since he was a boy, Tubbo had always thought with his head rather than his heart.

“If I’m being honest, I also wanted to take a look as well. He seemed strangely invested in getting his hands on this and I want to know why.”

“Nosy old man,” Phil said while shaking his head in amusement.

“Sue me. I’m curious,” Schlatt said with a shrug and then tucked the book beneath his arm. “And I believe with that, I’ll leave you to drown in your work, Your Majesty.”

“Or...you could, y’know help?” Phil rolled his eyes with a half smile. Schlatt snorted.

“I’ve got my own pile to bury myself into. Besides, you said it yourself. The bird is better help.” Schlatt gave the emperor a mock bow and Crow chirped in laughter as her husband flipped off the ram in response.

“Bastard.”

You dug that grave yourself, angel. Kristin thought.

Phil sighed and rounded his desk once again. He slumped in his chair and rested his head atop his arms. Crow hopped in front of him and chirped.

Her angel eyed her for a moment and suddenly his eyes became sad.

“You had to be a raven, didn’t you?” Phil shifted a hand across the desk for her to perch on. “Not that you could help it I suppose. But...you are a smart one to be sure.” Phil turned to the window and let out a shaky breath.

“Are you one of hers, I wonder?”

Too close.

Kristin could practically hear *them* yelling at her to back off. That she was toeing the line too closely. She already knew they would be displeased that she’d been around Phil at all. It had been her punishment for breaking her oath of death that she was not allowed to be with her family, in human form that is. Thankfully, someone convinced the other gods for leniency and they abided.

Kristin was allowed to see her family to a certain extent but only in disguise. She’d be barred from returning at all if she was found out.

I’m sorry, my angel. I wish I could answer that. But for the sake of our Theseus, I can’t.

Kristin flew out the window before Phil could say another word.

The emperor watched mournfully as the bird soared away. He buried his face in his hands and said solemnly, “No. I suppose not.”

Sam's axe clashed against Techno's sword, causing the younger man to startle slightly. He recovered quickly though and pushed the creeper-hybrid back a foot or two. Sam huffed and tilted his head, frustrated.

"You need to focus. You're all over the place today," Sam scolded, causing Techno to growl lowly and lunge for him.

Sam quickly sidestepped but Techno whirled around just in time to avoid losing his balance. Sam swung low and Techno was quick to parry it. The piglin huffed in irritation and aimed high. Sam blocked it and Techno tried again, and again, each blow growing stronger and stronger until eventually, Sam appeared to grow bored and ducked low to try and kick out his legs.

Techno jumped in time and before Sam could rise back to his feet, Techno attempted to kick him down.

"Now you're just throwing a tantrum, eh?" Sam jumped back and Techno could feel his eyes flare red as Chat began to rile up from the taunting. "Ah...Hello, Chat. It's been a while since I've fought you. You seem to be distracting my student."

Techno tried to block out Chat's angry retorts. *Calm down*.

Techno's head felt fuzzy with rage that wasn't his own. *Calm down*. Techno charged the man again, brutally bringing down his sword against Sam's axe as Chat grew louder in his head.

"Breathe, Techno," Sam warned, shoving the prince back. "Don't let them control you."

Breathe.

Chat hissed collectively in response. **No.**

Blood.

Blood.

Blood.

Techno inhaled deeply in response. *Stop it.*

Chat screeched in retaliation.

“They’re not listening, Sam. Call it,” Techno gritted and swung again, and this time Sam narrowly avoided the attack.

“Not yet. Make them listen. They’re not in charge, remember?” Sam leaped back and parried another heavy hit.

“They’re anxious today. It’s making them irritable.” Techno shook his head, pushing back against Sam’s axe. Sam nodded and then grinned.

“Am I irritating you, Chat?” Sam taunted.

Yes.

Blood.

Blood.

Blood for the Blood God.

Enough. You can’t act like this. Techno hissed at them. He suddenly gasped when he felt a slight pull from Chat as they attempted to take the reins from him. Techno dropped his sword the second he felt himself lose control, even if it was only for a brief moment. As it clattered against the ground Sam finally backed off.

Shut up. Techno thought. Chat hissed and instead of a collection of voices, all he heard was one.

Would you act like this in front of Wilbur or Dad? Ranboo or Tubbo? Techno paused and then thought. *How about Tommy?*

Then he added out loud, “Is that why you’ve been acting so odd lately?”

Chat stopped dead in their tracks, seemingly taken aback. Tommy’s face briefly flashed in his mind.

no.

Yes.

no!

we don’t know.

E

we wouldn’t hurt tommy

shut up

emote only us pls.

technoSADGE

And as quickly as it had built up, Chat’s rage dispersed and Techno felt his eyes dull again to their normal crimson.

“There you are.” Techno relaxed and took a deep breath as Chat settled down a bit and scattered. No longer speaking in one loud cacophony they returned to their normal jumbled chaos.

Techno turned his face to the still-cloudy sky and sighed.

“You good?” Sam asked tentatively, still tensed for another outburst. Techno nodded.

“Yeah...They’re done.”

“Techno?” A familiar voice called out and Techno felt his heart drop to his stomach. Techno turned to see Ranboo and Tommy standing at the door that led back inside. He felt nauseated all of a sudden. *How long have they been standing there?*

Tommy’s rather startled expression answered his question. He had his hand intertwined around Ranboo’s in a nervous gesture. *Shit.*

He felt a wave of shame stemming from Chat hit him.

Technoblade swallowed. “You’re early.”

“Wilbur had to go do some work with Schlatt and Niki had to start working on orders so I brought him here,” Ranboo explained sheepishly.

Techno walked over to the pair and breathed out a soft sigh of relief when Tommy didn’t flinch away. He simply stood there with a curious, yet concerned expression. “Sorry if I scared you.”

Tommy shook his head. “You didn’t, Big T. Are you okay?”

Techno frowned and instead responded with another question. “Did you know that I have powers too? Well... it's not really a power, it's more of a curse.” Techno winced when Chat jabbed him. “Ow.”

“You do?” Tommy’s eyes brightened with curiosity.

Techno nodded. “I’ve got this...entity, er...group of entities? I guess? They’re tethered to me. I hear them all day, everyday. And sometimes...”

He felt a frown pull at his cheeks. “Sometimes...they get angry and they try to take it out on others.”

“Are they evil?” Tommy asked. Techno exhaled a small breath through his nose and crossed his arms. *If only it were so black and white.*

“No. No, they’re not evil, not all of them at least. They were all once people I think. They’ve all got ideas and feelings of their own.”

“Why do they get angry?”

“If I was a lost soul tethered with a bunch of others to some random guy forever, I think I’d be a little irritated sometimes too.” Techno gave a small smile and Tommy chuckled softly.

“I suppose I would be too if I had to be stuck with you.”

“*What’s that supposed to mean?*” Techno grinned. He wrapped an arm around the blonde and then destroyed Wilbur’s hard work by tangling up his hair. Tommy hissed in retaliation and batted the man away. He took a moment to fix his hair and then flipped him off.

“*Ehem.*”

Techno turned to see Sam looking at him with an expression that read, *‘Dear gods there’s now another one...’*

“Tommy, this is Sam. Sam, this is Tommy.”

Sam reached out a hand which Tommy stared at blankly. Techno snorted. *Of course, he doesn’t know what a handshake is.*

“You shake it. It’s a greeting,” Sam explained, catching on instantly. With him, Wilbur, and Ranboo coming to the castle with no social experience at all, Sam was a natural when it came to awkward greetings.

“Oh.. *shit* , sorry,” Tommy stammered and gently shook his hand.

“You’re doing better than Techno, kid. He tried to bite me when I first explained what a high-five was.”

Tommy snorted which quickly turned into him busting out laughing. Ranboo joined him and Techno frowned.

“Ranboo you cried the first time Tubbo tried to hug you. Shut up.” Techno pointed out and the enderman instantly flushed a light shade of purple.

“It’s uh...It’s nice to meet you, Sam. Techno told me you were very hittable,” Tommy said blankly and this time Sam was the one holding back laughter.

“Did he, now? Did he specify what exactly you’d be hitting me with?” Sam asked, raising a brow. Tommy grinned and held up his frying pan.

To his credit, Sam only looked taken aback for maybe a second before his expression evened out and he gave the teen a wry smile. “Well...that’s certainly a first. I’ll give you that. Makes it easy to hit you with how short it is, however.”

Tommy gasped in offense and hugged his pan tightly against his chest. “It’s okay Clementine, he didn’t mean it. You’re perfect the way you are.”

“You named your frying pan?” Ranboo asked with a laugh.

“Don’t people normally name weapons?”

“Touché,” Ranboo replied.

“Well I suppose we’ll just have to see if your pan lives up to her name then, won’t we? Techno, are you up to spar with Tommy while I get started with Ranboo?”

The thought of aiming a blade anywhere near Tommy almost made him physically ill.

“Yeah come on, Tech! You and me! I’ll fuck you up!” Tommy’s eyes sparkled with excitement. The kid was practically bouncing on the balls of his feet with the past ten minutes forgotten entirely.

I can’t.

“I-I...” Techno swallowed and Tommy must have seen... *something* in his expression because his face softened instantly. Tommy stilled and gave a gentle smile that was effortlessly natural coming from him.

Inherently Tommy in every way.

Primes, I’m starting to sound like Wilbur. Gross.

“Hey. Why don’t we use those little training swords, ey? I’m not sure I could handle the full strength of *The Blade* .” Tommy gestured wildly.

He felt his heart pang painfully in his chest at that. Techno gave a wobbly smile. “Yeah. Yeah, let’s do that. I can teach you a trick or two.”

Tommy beamed and for a moment it reminded him of the smile he would see Charlie give Quackity sometimes. Adoration.

Techno’s stomach churned.

Tommy turned and ran to pick up the decently made wooden swords that Techno used to use when sparring with his student. Ranboo had seemed less anxious with them and it had given Techno peace of mind. Tommy tossed one to Techno who caught it easily.

The blonde grinned.

“Okay, so I know you’re pretty skilled with your pan, but how much knowledge do you have on sword fighting?” Techno asked.

Tommy shrugged. “Bits and pieces. There was an old sword of my...er there was a sword in the tower I’d practice with.”

“Well how about we start with you trying to get a hit on me just so I can see where your skill level is at? I’ll dodge and parry but I won’t strike, got it?”

Tommy grinned and hopped back a few feet with the grace of a young rabbit who still wasn’t quite used to his own speed. “Got it.”

Techno rolled his eyes fondly and readied his stance.

Needless to say, Techno wasn’t shocked when Tommy almost immediately lunged for him the moment he got into place. The kid was impulsive in battle, which admittedly sometimes worked to his benefit. Other times it landed him weaponless against an opponent with a knife.

Techno weaved right, effortlessly avoiding the blonde, and spun around just in time to parry another swipe from Tommy who huffed in concentration. His brows had furrowed and his jaw was tightly clenched as Techno pushed him back. Tommy hopped back another foot or two and circled the man, looking for any possible opening he could find.

Techno had to admit, the kid was much more analytical than he initially gave him credit for. Whereas his first two attacks had been focused on surprise and brute strength, his third was rather crafty. Tommy lunged for him again and Techno immediately raised his blade to parry, however at the last moment, Tommy dove right and whipped around to strike him from the back.

Techno ducked and just barely missed the blade swinging overhead. He rose with a grin. “You’re pretty quick on your feet, but you’re relying too much on your strength.”

“Eh?” Tommy sputtered while swiping at him again with as much force as he could.

Techno danced back, missing the blow. “You keep trying to brute force me. If you keep that up you’ll tire yourself out much faster than you think. You’re small, Tommy, use that to your advantage.”

“But I always thought you were supposed to hit *hard* and *fast* when it came to swords.” Tommy took a step back, puzzled.

“Maybe if you're my size, but even then that fighting style will tire you out pretty quickly. Someone your size should prioritize speed and agility. Think before you attack as you did earlier. Take into account your opponent's size and utilize it to your advantage.”

Tommy lowered his sword for a moment and furrowed his brow. “My advantage..”

“Take me for example. Where do you think my weak points are?” Techno took a step back to let Tommy look him over.

“Your legs,” Tommy answered instantly and Techno hummed. “You rarely defend them since your sword is usually guarding higher.”

“And that’s why I can still beat his ass!” Sam called out with a laugh while he was mid-fight with Ranboo. Techno scoffed.

“Keep talking shit, old man. Maybe then I’ll stop going easy on you,” Techno spat back with no real venom.

Sam snorted as he blocked a blow from Ranboo. “You see the disrespect I have to put up with, Tommy?”

Tommy laughed, “Oh I wouldn’t expect any better from me. I’m just as bad.” Suddenly Techno tapped Tommy’s sword with his own.

“Focus up, kid.”

Tommy shifted back into position, his sword raised. Techno circled him, watching intently at his expression. To his surprise, Tommy's eyes revealed nothing about his next attack.

Tommy decided to go for a direct attack. He jumped forward to strike Techno head-on and then immediately struck again.

Techno could see his eyes flicker to the right for a brief moment but that was all he needed to gather what Tommy's plan was.

The boy dove right and Techno whirled around with him to block another blow. Tommy grimaced and was about to strike again when a pained yelp interrupted their dance.

"Ranboo?" Sam's voice pierced through the air, filled with concern. The two turned their heads toward the man. Sam was squatting down next to the enderling with his hands floating just above Ranboo's back. Ranboo's eyes were scrunched up tightly.

"You okay, kid?" Techno called out, his wooden sword dropping to the ground alongside Tommy's. Forgotten.

The enderman let out a pained hiss, "M'fine. I think I just pinched a nerve in my back or something. Primes, that hurts."

Ranboo placed their hand in between their scapula and Tommy stiffened at Techno's side. The teen sucked in a shuttered breath and then uttered, "Oh shit..."

Techno turned to him and raised a brow. Suddenly Tommy yelled, "Ranboo, let me see your wings!"

"Huh?" The enderman's head whipped to the side, confused. Tommy sprinted over to them and knelt behind them.

“Just trust me. Let me see.”

Ranboo nodded, their eyes still clenched in pain and they let their wings fall from their back. Techno sucked in a breath through his teeth as he took in the sight.

... *What the hell?*

Their wings.

They—

Tommy whimpered and buried his face in his hands. “Shit. Oh *shit* . Ranboo, I'm so sorry! I swear I didn't mean to!”

Ranboo's head was craned to the side, their eyes wide in disbelief at the sight of their right wing.

Which was no longer tattered to shreds. There were still a few holes in the left but they were way smaller than before. But...

It had been healed.

Tommy...

Tommy had done the impossible.

Tommy had healed Ranboo.

“Dude...” Ranboo rasped, their eyes still blown wide. “What the hell did you do?”

There was no anger in Ranboo's voice, only incredulity.

"I didn't mean to, I swear. My powers went off in the bakery. But it was only for a moment, it shouldn't have affected anything. I never thought...I don't know how...It never works that *fast*," Tommy stammered.

"You fixed them...Holy crap, Tommy. *You fixed them.*"

"I'm sorry." Tommy was shaking, his face distraught.

Ranboo shook their head and then looked up at him. Their eyes were bleary with tears. "Why? *Tommy you...you don't know what this means to me.* You...you're amazing, Tommy."

Tommy flinched at that and then snapped his head up to say, "*No I'm not.* I could've hurt you. My powers went off on their own! I-I...I gotta go." With that, Tommy shot to his feet. He stumbled back a few feet, nearly falling over in his panic until Techno caught him by the arm.

"Tommy..." He began but Sam cleared his throat and shook his head. Techno sighed and released his grip on the teen allowing him to dart off.

"Let him breathe. He's freaked out. All of you are," Sam said, and then helped Ranboo to their feet. Ranboo whimpered a bit at the tenderness of their newly healed scales. "We need to get you to Bad. If *whatever* is going on was an accident then we need to make sure you're not hurt."

"But I'm not! He didn't do anything wrong," Ranboo growled.

"I'm not saying he did, kid. But it was an accident, *whatever he did*. It's just to be sure."

"But Tommy..." Ranboo's expression looked pained, and this time it wasn't from the ache in their wings.

"...Needs his space," Techno finished. *Shit.*

“But—“ Ranboo exclaimed but Techno cut him off.

“He's probably overwhelmed out of his mind, Ranboo. He'd never even seen wings other than his own till two days ago. I wouldn't be surprised if his nerves were shot to hell,” Techno stated and then added, “Go with Sam. I'll keep an eye on him.”

Ranboo let out a sigh and looked over at where Tommy had fled, finally they nodded. “Alright.”

With that, Sam dragged Ranboo off leaving Techno with his thoughts...and Chat.

Who were strangely quiet.

“Don't go quiet on me now. Tell me what to do,” Techno huffed.

you already know

you've done this before

“You're somehow even less helpful when you're coherent, you know that?” Techno hissed and then picked up Tommy's frying pan from where he'd left it resting by Techno's sword.

Techno tilted his head back toward the sky.

He wished it was still raining.

Tommy skipped dinner that night, even when Wilbur came knocking on the door asking him to come out.

“I just want to be left alone, Wil. I’m fine, just tired,” Tommy had said, trying to keep the shakiness out of his voice.

He could practically hear Wilbur frowning through the doorway. “They’re okay, you know that? Their wings are *fine*. Ranboo isn’t mad at you, they’re quite the opposite actually. Tubbo says he could probably patch the remaining tears with the prosthetic fabric he’s been working on.”

“That’s not...” Tommy bit his tongue and then said, “That’s not the *point*. I didn’t even mean to do it! What if I’d hurt them? My powers don’t magically set bone back into place, and healing wings while they’re still in your back is *dangerous*. I could’ve... *just leave me alone, Wilbur.*”

His skin was crawling, and his brain was buzzing at a pace that made him want to scream. Everything was just too much. He needed time to *breathe*.

Wilbur sighed. “Okay, Toms. I’ll come to wake you in the morning, okay?”

“Kay,” Tommy had replied, the back of his head lightly thumping against the door. He didn’t move from that spot until a couple of hours later. There was a knock at the door and Tommy blinked blearily out of the light doze he’d fallen into.

“Tommy? You awake?” A voice called out.

“Phil?” Tommy asked, confused. He stood from his spot on the floor and nearly fell over when dark spots speckled his vision and his body buzzed like static. “Woah...”

Tommy fumbled for a moment and braced himself on the wall. He inhaled deeply through his nose a couple of times until his vision cleared.

“You okay?” Phil called and Tommy chuckled, mostly to himself. “Can I come in?”

“Sorry. I almost passed out, uh... Yeah, you can come in,” Tommy replied sheepishly.

Phil let out a startled sound and instantly opened the door, his eyes searching the room until he found the teen still leaning heavily against the wall.

Tommy hummed a tad loopily when he felt the back of a warm hand press against his forehead for a long moment. Phil clicked his tongue. “When was the last time you ate something? And don’t say dinner. Wilbur told me you skipped it.”

Fucking snitch.

“Erm...uh...I guess the pastry I ate this morning?”

Phil narrowed his eyes at him and drew back his hand. Tommy forced himself to hold back the whine lodged in his throat. “Gods, you’re as bad as Tubbo. C’mon, I’m getting you something to eat. “

“But...” Tommy began to argue but was quickly silenced by Phil’s stern expression. “Alright, alright. Fine. But isn’t the kitchen closed at this hour?”

Phil raised an eyebrow. “Tommy, I’ve been alive since almost the dawn of time. I’m pretty sure I can make a fucking sandwich by now.”

Tommy choked back a startled laugh. “Fair enough, big man. Fair enough.”

Phil wrapped an arm gently around his shoulder, presumably to keep him from falling down, and escorted him out the door. After a few moments, Phil pulled away and once again Tommy had to fight back a frown.

Maybe I am the clingy one, huh.

Phil crossed his hands behind his back as they made their way down the hallway. Tommy instinctively (*instinctively?*)—*absentmindedly* mimicked the posture. As he looked around he noticed something odd that he hadn’t seen the first few he’d walked through this hall. On one of the

doors, there was a padlock. And from the looks of it, it didn't seem like anyone had unlocked it recently.

He stopped in his tracks, curious. "What's that?"

Phil stopped at his side and a frown tugged at his lips. His voice was heavy as he answered, "That uh...that was the nursery. It was where the boys slept when they were younger. At least until..."

Oh.

I really need to learn to shut the fuck up sometimes.

"Sorry," Tommy said and Phil's frown deepened.

"What did I tell you about apologizing?"

Tommy ducked his head and Phil's posture relaxed. He took in a breath. "After Theseus...the twins couldn't stand being in that room. So we blocked it off. Now the only person who goes in it is one of the maids who keeps it clean."

Don't ask it. Don't ask it. "When was the last time you went in there?" *Goddammit.*

Phil seemed surprised by the question, but not offended. He hummed to himself for a moment and then replied, "Theseus' tenth birthday, so nearly five years ago. I was only in there for maybe a minute. It was all I could stand. There are too many bad memories in that room."

"Does the good not counter the bad?" Tommy asked and Phil quirked his head at that. Tommy swallowed. "You said it was their nursery. I'm sure there were a lot of happy memories in that room too. If you focus on the good memories while you're there...the bad ones usually don't sting as bad."

He was speaking from experience.

“Some memories are just a little too painful, Tommy,” Phil replied, his voice barely above a whisper. “Come on, kid.”

Tommy swallowed but nodded and followed the Emperor without another word.

When they reached the kitchen Tommy’s stomach was twisted in knots and he couldn’t tell if it was because of anxiety or the fact that his blood sugar was in the garbage.

“Easy kid, don’t pass out on me. Here,” Phil said and passed him a cup full of amber liquid. Tommy wrinkled his nose.

“Is this fucking piss? Did you give me a cup full of piss, Philza Minecraft?” Tommy said, feigning as much seriousness as he could.

Phil sputtered and a smile wormed his way back on his face. *Success*. “Christ, Tommy, *no*. It’s just apple juice.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes and hummed. “*Apple piss.*”

“Just drink it, you hellion.” Phil laughed and then began working on a sandwich for him.

“Just letting you know I’m a vegetarian by the way,” Tommy said and then took a few small sips of his apple piss. Phil looked back at him with a knowing expression.

“I had a feeling you might be.”

“What gave it away?” Tommy hopped up on the table and kicked his legs absentmindedly.

“Usually most bird avians are. The only reason Wilbur and Techno aren’t is that they’re piglin hybrids. It’s kind of an instinct thing.”

“Huh. *Weird.*” Tommy finished off his juice and laid back, letting his back overhang off the edge of the table. His wings flopped to the ground below and he giggled at the upside-down world around him.

“ *Tommy...* ” Phil chided without any real scorn. “Please don’t bash your head on the floor. Wilbur will get mad at me.”

“Wilbur can eat—“

“ *Tommy.* ”

Tommy groaned. “Ugh...fine.” Tommy effortlessly sat back up. Phil grinned triumphantly and handed Tommy his sandwich, which he instantly shoved in his mouth.

“You’re a goddamn saint, Philza Minecraft,” Tommy said, mouth full of lettuce and tomato and other ingredients.

Phil poked his forehead and replied, “Chew your food, child.”

“ *Bleh*... ” Tommy stuck out his tongue.

“Gross.” Phil tried and failed to keep the humor out of his voice. He turned to the other counter and took a kettle out of one of the cupboards.

“What are you making now?” Tommy asked, voice now clear of sandwich.

“Coffee. *For me.* I highly doubt you need the caffeine,” Phil said, filling the kettle with water and then setting in on the stovetop.

“You can’t tell me what to do. I’m an adult.” Tommy pouted.

Philza scoffed. “First off, I’m the Emperor, so yes I can. Second of all, you’re not eighteen. I won’t make you say your age but you’re not eighteen.”

“Rude.” Tommy frowned. Phil simply smiled and filtered his drink. Once he was done he poured some of it into a mug and then turned around to lean against the counter.

“So, you gonna tell me what happened with Ranboo? I already gathered that you have some kind of healing magic so don’t worry about explaining that bit. Their suddenly healed wings explain it pretty well.” Phil sipped at his drink, taking in Tommy’s expression.

Tommy simply tucked his knees into his chest and buried his face into them. “It was an accident. I didn’t mean to. They just went off on their own, I didn’t realize what I’d done until it was too late.”

“Then stop beating yourself up over it. You said it was an accident.”

Tommy’s head shot up and he hissed, “I could’ve hurt Ranboo. *Really badly*. Their wings could’ve fused with the muscles in their back. *They could’ve gotten stuck*. Which could’ve killed them.”

“Yes, but did *any* of that happen?” Phil asked.

“No, but—“

“Then stop blaming yourself over a possibility. Ranboo is fine and you have given them back something that had been brutally taken from them a long time ago,” Phil interjected. Tommy stared at the wall, still not entirely convinced.

Philza sighed. Seemingly realizing he wasn’t going to be able to get through to Tommy on this. He stood up and spoke gently, “Come on, Tommy. Let’s get you to bed. We’ve all got a long day tomorrow.”

Tommy nodded and hopped off the counter, letting Phil lead him out. The trip back to his room was a silent one, but not uncomfortably so. If anything it was rather cathartic. Before Phil said goodbye he turned to the teen and said softly,

“Don’t let your thoughts now ruin tomorrow, okay? You deserve to have fun tomorrow. You make my sons smile, which is something I rarely get to see nowadays. And if there’s one thing I know is that Theseus loved making people smile more than anything. He wouldn’t want them to be sad tomorrow, he wouldn’t want you to be sad either. So cheer up. Everything will look better in the morning.”

With that, he gently ruffled the teen’s hair and gave him one last smile before walking into his room. Tommy stood there for a long moment, just letting what Phil had told him to sink in.

Ranboo was okay...they were *fine*. He’d been so scared the moment he’d realized what he’d done. The fear of not only Ranboo’s eyes flashing at him with anger, but Niki’s, Sam’s, Tubbo’s...Wilbur and Techno’s.

Tommy swallowed. *Phil.*

It was overwhelming to say the least. But at the end of the day...it had worked out. Perhaps even for the better.

Maybe he was right. Maybe I just need to—

Tommy.

A voice echoed down the hall and Tommy had to bite back a yelp. His head whipped around to dark hallway behind him that was only lit by the faintest bit of moonlight that was streaming through the window. Tommy swallowed, fearfully and closed his eyes. He was afraid if he looked any closer that he’d see a face peering back at him in the darkness.

“Who’s there?” Tommy chattered, still refusing to open his eyes. The voice spoke again.

Don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you.

I need you to see something.

The voice was definitely that of a woman. Her voice was calm and kind in a way that warmed the bone-chilling fear coiling in his chest. It felt like a heated blanket around his shoulders in the midst of a winter storm.

It was almost... *familiar*. Like a passing dream that seemed to faintly prick at an old memory locked deep in the archives of his mind. He'd heard her voice before, which he knew was impossible. But perhaps it was from a different life. A different world.

A different *him*.

"Who are you?" Tommy whispered, his voice unsteady.

Nobody you'd remember anymore.

"What?" Tommy leaned heavily against the door, still debating in his mind whether or not it was a good idea to even listen to whoever was talking to him. "What the fuck was in that piss?" Tommy muttered to himself.

Follow me. Follow my voice.

"It's dark as shit, how am I supposed to follow you? Also, why the hell should I follow you? How do I know you aren't an axe murderer or something?" Tommy pointed out. The voice let out a warm chuckle and then Tommy gasped when a ball of warm golden light appeared in front of him. The glow of the wisp glinted off of his pale blue eyes which were currently bulging in disbelief. It was almost as if the light was alive because it began to move and swirl through the air. It twirled around him almost *fondly*.

"Oh primes, I've lost it haven't I?" Tommy sighed and released the handle of the door.

Follow me, Tommy.

There's something you need to see.

“If I get axe murdered I’m gonna be really fucking pissed,” Tommy muttered and followed the light that had already begun to dance down the hall.

Techno wasn't sure what possessed him to climb out of bed this late at night (morning?). But he'd woken up with a sudden start that shot him up in his bed. He inhaled deeply and frowned at the strange emotion swirling inside his chest. It wasn't fear, but rather *concern*. It tugged him from his bed and dragged him over to the closet.

He wasn't sure why he felt the need to go check outside his door but he trusted his instincts enough that he wasn't going to question it. Chat murmured sleepily amongst themselves but didn't wake much more than that.

Techno felt almost robotic as he quickly dressed himself. His pink hair hung loosely at his side as he pulled on a white button-up and tucked it loosely into his pants. He shucked on his shoes and grabbed a candle as he exited his room.

As soon as he entered the hallway he knew almost immediately what he was following. Or more accurately, *who*.

Tommy.

The teen was walking down the hallway barefoot. He seemed to be swaying almost as if each footstep was full of uncertainty. The teen's hand dragged alongside the wall as if to keep him steady.

Where...Where is he going?

Tommy rounded the corner and Techno immediately began jogging to catch up with him. As he darted down a staircase after him there was a faint whisper in the back of his mind that couldn't help but point out the lack of guards on duty.

Something's...off.

A part of him wondered if he should call out to Tommy and lead him back to his room. But another part of him wanted to see where he was going. Tommy didn't strike him as someone who'd *like* to explore the castle in the middle of the night.

No. He's headed somewhere.

He's following something.

But whatever it was, Techno couldn't see it. As they traveled down hallway after hallway, staircase after staircase he started to become increasingly alarmed at the severe lack of guards. And they'd been walking for *a while*. Not only that but Techno was starting to realize where he might be headed. And it terrified him.

There's no way. There is no way he knows where that is.

Tommy rounded another corner and Techno felt his heart drop to his stomach as Tommy grabbed the handle of a familiar pair of large spruce doors.

Before he could open it, Techno called out, "Tommy."

The blonde's head whipped to the side and his eyes widened dramatically. "Technoblade?"

His voice was off, it lacked emotion. His eyes were a dulled shade of their normal icy blue.

"What are you doing here?" Techno asked, taking a step forward. His eyes scanned around looking for any sign of danger but there was nothing. Only Tommy. Who seemed rather out of it.

Tommy looked up at him and said with a voice so small that it sent a chill down his spine, "I'm... following. I heard...someone...but..." Tommy trailed for a moment before some life flickered back into his eyes. He gave a weak smile. "...It could be an axe murderer so I'm actually kinda glad you're here."

Tommy attempted a weak laugh but it fell flat.

Techno set a hand on Tommy's shoulder and the kid bit his lip anxiously and leaned his cheek against Techno's hand. "I don't feel right."

Techno nodded and squeezed gently before pulling away. "I know. I feel it too. Something's not right. Who did you hear?"

Tommy's fingers clenched tightly around the handle. "She wanted to show me something. Did you hear her too?"

Techno's heart skipped a beat and he realized at that moment that Chat had gone *dead* silent.

She.

Techno shook his head. "No, I just woke up for some reason and knew I needed to follow you. Are you okay?"

"My head feels weird. It feels foggy...and I don't know where I am." Tommy turned to him and then tugged on the door handle. "I don't know what's happening."

Techno stopped the door from opening up all the way and asked calmly, "I'm right here. It's okay. But Tommy. How did you get here without a candle?"

"You're shaking, Techno." Tommy pointed out even though he was also trembling. "She wanted to show me what was in here. She said it was important that I see it. Can I see?"

Techno swallowed tightly but nodded and pulled away. The door opened with a loud creak and Tommy entered, with Techno following in close behind.

Pain prickled at his heart as he stepped into the chamber. It had been a long time since he'd been here. It had been a long time since he'd been to the room where his father had slept for a thousand years and his little brother had been born.

How did you know where this was? How?

This is all too similar.

Tommy walked to the center of the room and spun around, slowly taking in all the details, his eyes shot to the golden bed his father had rested on.

"This is where Phil had slept?" Tommy asked and Techno nodded weakly. He felt nauseous.

This is impossible.

"Tommy. You didn't answer my question." Techno's voice seemed to echo and Tommy flinched.

The boy turned around and said, "I followed a light. It was golden and weird but it seemed warm... like the voice. I don't know why she led me here though, it's just a room... I don't understand."

Techno's voice died in his throat. He stared at Tommy for a long time and it felt like lightning shooting through him when he finally saw what he'd been telling himself hadn't been there at all.

This can't be happening. Not after all this time. His chest burned with simmered anger as another puzzle piece clicked into place.

Chat. Wake up.

You know. That's why you've been so distant.

Tell me! Fucking wake up you cowards!

There was no response. Chat had blocked him out again. They'd left him at the exact moment when everything around him was crumbling to the ground. His breath hitched in his throat.

Please. I need you to tell me.

Tommy's expression suddenly brightened, as if he'd suddenly come to his senses. "Techno?"

How are you real?

"You're right, Tommy." Techno swallowed and gently placed a hand on his shoulder. His hand slowly came up to swipe a few strands of loose hair from his eyes. Tommy stared back at him, clearly concerned by Techno's pained expression.

"Tech?"

The boy in front of him seemed like a ghost to him now, one that he thought he'd buried a long time ago.

His voice trembled, tight with emotion as Techno whispered, *"It's just a room."*

Chapter End Notes

whistles innocently

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you liked the art for this chapter consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on twitter, tumblr, tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

To Be My Wings and My Eyes

Chapter Notes

chugs cough syrup Hi yes I'm very ill with COVID rn but its been two goddamn months and I have worked my ass off on this chapter and 25 (which will be out sometime after Arbi gets back from vacation lol.)

Till then, no beta we die like JuanaFlippa

Either way you should still go follow their Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

TW: Slight Character Injury (nothing graphic)

Word Count: 7.5k

ARBITER MADE ME A WHOLE ANIMATIC ABOUT TGP FOR CHRISTMAS!!! GO WATCH IT RN!!!

<https://youtu.be/0e9fh6BahTw>

have fun with the chapter and thank you all for being so patient with me mwah<3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Mum, I don’t want to wear it. It’s itchy,” A young voice speaks gently into the darkness. Tommy turns to it and sees nothing but the abyss. There is the soft sound of a woman chuckling followed by a melodic hum.

“Hello?” Tommy called out, his hands reaching ahead but finding nothing to hold on to. He hears footsteps draw close to him and a chill runs up his spine.

“It’s a ball, Thes—” The voice cuts off, suddenly muffled and it feels as if there is water in his ears. It sloshes around and fills his brain with nothing but fuzz. And then the burning begins and Tommy cries out. He falls to his knees and shoves his hands over his ears. It does little to quiet the voice as it becomes clear once more, “...we have to keep up appearances. Which includes even the youngest member of our—”

The pain strikes him again and Tommy screams. His wings twitch agitatedly at his side and the fire in his mind—no his whole body grows hotter.

“But —bo doesn’t have to wear it!” The child whines. Tommy vaguely registered the garbled name as he gasped for air.

“Stop,” Tommy pleads. “Please, be quiet.”

*“..bo..isn’t royalty, darling,” The woman says, her tone full of adoration. **What the hell are you talking about? Please, please stop.***

“Tommy.” An arm suddenly hooked under his shoulder and he's effortlessly hauled up to his feet. The person turns him around to face him. The pain stops.

He opens his eyes blearily to see Techno staring back at him with that same haunted expression he’d seen in Phil’s coma bunker, or whatever it was called. Techno’s face fell and Tommy let out a choked sound.

Grief. Love. Loss. Disbelief. Guilt. Astonishment. All of it looked back at him, mournfully. All of it swirled around together, entwined together like strands of fiber into a tight rope meant to strangle him.

This is a dream. None of this is real. He’s not real.

His back was burning, but suddenly it wasn’t painful anymore. It was warm, like a blanket strewn across his shoulders during a winter storm. Tommy turned his gaze and noticed that a soft orange light highlighted the planes of the prince’s expression.

He smelled fire.

Techno’s eyes shone and he peered at something behind Tommy. Tommy’s voice caught in his throat and he found himself unable to move. Unable to breathe when the darkness around him seemed close to swallowing both of them whole. He wasn’t sure the fire would be able to survive it.

*He smelled smoke. **Where is the fire coming from?***

“How are you real?” Techno whispered and his hand came up to brush the strand of hair that always seemed to fall in front of his eyes out of the way. Tommy’s eyes widened and he turned, pushing Techno away as he felt the blanket’s warmth melt away, growing hotter and hotter.

Tommy screamed. His wings were on fire.

Tommy shot forward, his eyes wide as he sat up. Only to immediately bang his head on the underside of the bed. “Fucking–shit!”

What the hell?

He looked around as he rubbed the growing red mark on his forehead. He was underneath his bed. Last night after Techno had taken him back to his room, Tommy decided he could no longer stand the soft mattress and plush pillows. How could he feel at peace when Techno hadn’t even been able to look at him on the way back? He had hardly even been able to speak to him. The memory left a tight knot in his throat.

“Wait! Did I do something wrong?” Tommy whispered loudly as he stumbled after Techno. He grabbed his arm, and Techno flinched. It was subtle. But it was enough.

Tommy felt his heart drop as he let go and took a shaky step back. Tears prickled the corners of his eyes. He’d done it. He’d finally fucked up enough. Techno hated him.

“I-I’m sorry,” Tommy choked out while looking at the ground. He didn’t dare look up when he saw Techno’s body shift, presumably to glare at him.

There was a long stretch of terrible silence and Tommy jumped slightly when Techno finally spoke, “No, Tommy. You didn’t do anything wrong. Go to bed.”

Without another word, Techno left, leaving Tommy practically frozen in place. Eventually, he felt Crow land on his shoulder, and she nudged her beak into his cheek, stirring him back from the daze.

"I fucked up. I fucked up bad, Crow." Tommy swallowed. He put his head in his hands and stalked into his room, still mindful to quietly shut the door. Tommy paced around anxiously for a moment, terror building up in his chest again.

*"What if... What if they change their minds? What if...?" Tommy had murmured to Crow, distraught. And then like the strike of a match, Tommy surged forward and punched the innocent armoire to his right as hard as he could. He bit his tongue to muffle the angered yell that tore from his throat. His knuckles cracked painfully against the hard oaken wood and he felt the skin split. Crow cawed and flew off, startled by the violence. **Sorry.***

Stumbling back he groaned and eyed the armoire he'd just assaulted. Not a scratch, thankfully. Clearly, the furniture was not willing to yield to a hysterical, uncoordinated swing from a scrawny fifteen-year-old.

And instead of hitting it again, Tommy had sunk to his knees and held his injured hand tenderly.

"Fuck," He whispered solemnly into the darkness, illuminated only by the glowing bones of Tommy's hand as his magic gently tried to fix the fracture.

The smell of burning suddenly brought Tommy back to the present. He felt his wings twitch rather harshly, stretching out the still-tender joints rather painfully. Tommy yelped and scrambled out from beneath the bed. Looking at where he was a moment ago, Tommy sucked in a breath through his teeth. The floor beneath the bed had been charred nearly black.

He stumbled to his feet and began to look himself over for burns. *What the fuck is happening today?*

His dream, had it been real then? Tommy swallowed. He turned to look back at his wings and sighed in relief. At first glance, only bent red feathers and scarred muscle met his gaze. His wings weren't on fire. *Probably.*

Tommy gently ran a hand through his feathers until he was able to tug out a loose one. He held the vibrant red in between his thumb and forefinger for a long moment and squinted. His eyes then suddenly widened. *Wait... What is that?*

There was a faint shimmer to his feather. It wasn't that it was sparkling or anything. It just seemed *alive*. It felt hot to the touch and then as quick as a strike of a match, it sparked a soft red-orange flame which died out almost immediately.

"What the fuck," Tommy gaped.

Tommy grabbed a piece of tissue paper from the side of his desk and ran into the bathroom. He stood before the sink, still not able to look at the mirror, and held the feather to the paper.

It instantly caught fire and burnt to a crisp in his hands, but failed to burn him even as the dull fire licked his fingertips.

Several things flitted through Tommy's mind about the implications of whatever the hell this was. And yet something inside of him snapped as it all became too much.

"Nope. Nope. Not happening. Not today. Fuck that."

Tommy dropped the feather in the sink and flipped on the bathtub faucet. He sat his wings in the tub and let the water run over them, putting out the dim flames. "That's a problem for tomorrow Tommy."

With that, Tommy dried himself off and threw on the clothes he'd had on yesterday. They weren't dirty anyway. As he pinned on his cloak he eyed the fiery feather in the sink. He hummed curiously and picked it up. He held it to his sleeve and his eyes widened in pure fascination when the cloth failed to burn.

"Oh good, it's self-aware," Tommy spat out with sarcasm dripping in his tone. He turned on the sink and extinguished the feather. He rested his hands against the side of the sink and let his chin bump against his chest.

“Gods. I’m a mess.” *Why couldn’t I have been born fucking normal?*

“Tommyinnit! Open this fucking door! I can hear you muttering to yourself! I need to smack the sense back into your doe-eyed, vacant head!” Tubbo’s voice carried loudly even all the way back to where Tommy was secluded in the bathroom. Tommy’s head popped up and he turned to the bathroom door where behind definitely stood a pissed-off ram. *Wait, what did he call me?*

Innit?

“Don’t freak him out!” Ranboo shushed. Tommy felt his heart clench painfully at Ranboo’s voice but he knew he couldn’t avoid their sincerity any longer. The enderling might be grateful for how he’d accidentally helped them but Tommy refused to forgive himself. He could have killed them if they had healed wrong. Ranboo got *lucky*. Tommy was a cur–

“Tommy, I am going to breach your privacy so hard if you do not open this goddamn door in the next ten seconds,” Tubbo threatened and Tommy swallowed suddenly nervous and in full confidence that Tubbo was not above making good on that threat.

“He’s definitely not going to do that,” Ranboo sighed, exasperated. “He’s probably in the bathroom for a reason, Bo.”

The nickname itched something in Tommy’s mind.

There were maybe two seconds of silence before Tubbo jiggled the doorknob and proclaimed, “Dick and balls, bitch! Open up!”

“Nope. *Stop that.*” There was a faint smacking sound and Tubbo hissed.

Tommy let a wobbly grin tug at his features and just like that, it all washed away. The dreams, the fire, the woman haunting him not only in his sleep but in the waking world. He shoved it all down and tucked it away for later.

Maybe it could still be a good day. After all, his dream was coming true today. He was going to see the lanterns today, something he'd been dreaming of his entire life.

He just hoped he wouldn't have to lose everything to achieve it. Tommy slowly clicked the lock and pulled open the door. The sight before him made him snort at first, then frown. Tubbo's hair was a fluffy and unruly mess while Ranboo looked like they hadn't even slept yet. Ranboo and Tubbo were both scowling but Ranboo's was directed at Tubbo. Who in turn eyed Tommy with what looked like an intent to kill. *Probably.*

Have they been worried all night? About me?

Tubbo stepped forward and gently clapped his hands together and then pointed towards him.

"You're such a blonde, you know that? Not a sensible thought in that empty head of yours," Tubbo said without any ire. Ranboo instantly thwacked the back of the ram's head.

Tubbo winced and cradled his uninjured head for a long overdramatic moment before firing back, "I'm right! Tommy, they're fine! Ranboo is fine!"

As if to prove it, Tubbo gestured wildly toward the prince. The brunette then pointed a finger at Tommy, poking it against his chest. "And if you continue to blame yourself for your powers accidentally going off and healing Ranboo, I will kill you myself and then donate your body to science."

With those impassionate words, Tubbo pulled Tommy into a tight hug.

"*Oh,*" Tommy gasped, stunned at first. He melted easily and wrapped his arms around the older boy. He buried his face into Tubbo's shoulder and smiled when he felt the hand gripping the back of his shirt tighten.

"What he means to say, is that he's grateful," Ranboo said with a smile. The enderling sniffed and then croaked, "And so am I. *Truly.*"

Tommy's eyes watered and he swallowed. He held out a hand to them and Ranboo squeezed it. *Nope. Get in here.* Tommy yanked Ranboo forward into the hug, sending the three wobbling slightly at the impact.

"You could've made your point with far fewer threats against my life, y'know?" Tommy said, murmuring into Tubbo's shoulder.

Tubbo pulled back and grinned deviously, "It's funnier if I'm mean about it."

Tommy pulled away and briefly peeked up his eyes at Ranboo. He crossed his arms and stared at the floor. *I need to know.* Tommy then asked in a quiet voice, "Do they still hurt? I'm so sorry that I—"

His expression wobbled as he remembered the pain he'd seen Ranboo in at the training yard. He'd done that. And they were grateful to him for it? Tommy didn't understand.

But something about his tone must have finally frayed enough of Ranboo's temper because the enderling grabbed Tommy by his shoulders and barked sharply, "Look at me, Tommy."

Tommy bit against his cheek but complied and turned his gaze up to meet one that shone a vibrant green and red. Ranboo spoke sternly and passionately, "Stop. I need you to stop. *Give yourself a goddamn break already and stop with all the self-blame. I don't like it.* I don't like seeing you hate yourself."

Ranboo took a breath and dropped his gaze slightly, "I'm okay, Tommy, truly. I'm a lot more durable than you give me credit for and you didn't hurt me. Do you understand?"

Even Tubbo seemed taken aback by Ranboo's serious tone. Tommy swallowed tight and buried his hands in his hair. The weight of Theseus' necklace was heavier than ever before. "You don't even know what I did. I fucked up. I've done nothing but fuck all of this up. I could've killed you, Ranboo. I—"

Ranboo crushed the boy into a hug and Tommy bit his tongue. *Fuck.*

“I’m okay and so are you. I don’t hate you. I could never hate you. You are stuck with us so deal with it,” Ranboo proclaimed and Tommy crumpled. His head thudded limply against Ranboo’s shoulder.

“I don’t want to lose you guys,” Tommy admitted. “I’m terrified of it because I know I’ll have to.”

“Tubbo was right. You are an idiot.” The enderman pulled back a bit and placed their hands on Tommy’s shoulders as they spoke softly, “*Stay.*”

“What?” Tommy inhaled sharply.

“Stay here. Don’t go back, Tommy. Stay with us,” Ranboo pleaded earnestly. “He hurt you so bad. I may not know as much as Wilbur and Techno but I know your brother messed you up. I know you love him, and that’s okay. But we can love you too. Techno and Wilbur are too broken to admit it but they would do anything for you. And Phil already adores you. Anyone with eyes can see that.”

Ranboo dropped their head. “I don’t care that it’s been three days and things never work out that fast but when have any of us ever done things normally?”

It felt like all the wind had been knocked from Tommy’s lungs.

“We can love you better.” Tubbo said, his voice hardly above a whisper. “So stay.”

Tommy opened his mouth to answer but before he could there was a knock at the door. Tubbo growled dramatically, “Every fuckin’ time...”

“Tommy? It’s Wilbur. S’time to wake up. We’ve got a few things to do before we leave and we need to get an early start.”

“We’re in here, Wil,” Tubbo called and the door opened. Wilbur slipped through and eyed Tommy heavily and then turned to look at the other two boys suspiciously.

“C’mon guys, did you make him cry already? It’s like ten o’clock in the morning.” Wilbur scowled. A bubble of hysteria welled up in Tommy’s chest and it felt like breathing in the air for the first time as he giggled. Wilbur frowned. “Oh wonderful, you broke him. Way to go.”

I could be happy here. I can fix things with Techno. I can be happy here.

I already am happy here.

This could be home.

He needed to think on it some more but it was the first time he’d really given not going back to the tower a second thought. He turned to Ranboo and Tubbo and grabbed the enderling’s hand, which *significantly* dwarfed his own. *Fucking tall ass*. His voice was honest as he spoke, “Let me think about it, okay?”

Ranboo’s eyes sparkled and they beamed. Tubbo grinned and wrapped an arm around his shoulder, pulling him into a half hug. Tommy laughed, “Alright, alright enough with the hugs you clingy bitches.”

“Uh...am I missing something?” Wilbur asked, walking over to the three.

“No more than usual,” Tommy snarked deviously and Wilbur shoved him playfully. After a moment or two, the older man turned to Tommy.

“Sorry to ask, but Phil was wondering how your wings are doing? Are they still healing at the same pace they were?”

Tommy instinctively bit his tongue, startled by the reminder that he was currently a fire hazard. He winced at the pain but tried to make his tone as steady as he could as he assured him, “They’re fine. Just a little sore from all the new feathers. But they feel so much better at the same time.”

Well, they were also on fire a few minutes ago but I’m gonna leave that bit out.

“I’m glad. Truly,” Wilbur said in earnest. “But you let me know if they start hurting again, okay? And please, *please*, don’t try putting them back in yet. They need time, okay?”

Images of yesterday made Tommy swallow nervously. Him cowering in the bathroom from a shadow in a mirror. The brunette rushing in when Tommy had slammed back into a shelf, knocking the contents from it. Wilbur holding him tight and telling him he’d keep him safe. And then...

Tommy looked up and nodded to him. Then he silently grabbed the brush from his nightstand and held it out to Wilbur. “I’m...uh...I’m still scared of the mirror.”

Wilbur's expression softened and he gently took the comb.

Wilbur started brushing the comb gently through the forever tangled mess that was Tommy’s hair. He turned to Ranboo and Tubbo. “You two you should go get ready and get something to eat. Meet us down in the kitchen when you’re ready.”

“Ranboo and I have some work to finish beforehand but we’ll see you guys before the lights ceremony,” Tubbo said and then added, “How about we meet you in the square sometime this afternoon before the ceremony starts?”

“But we don’t have any—*oof*.” Ranboo cut off as Tubbo elbowed him sharply in the ribs.

“Remember that *thing* Freddie had to show us for tonight? Also, you need to return that book you borrowed from Aimsey,” Tubbo stated at the enderling and Tommy had to stifle back a laugh at Ranboo’s frightened expression.

Ranboo’s eyes widened and they nodded. “Oh...*Oh...I am a dead man*. Aimes’ gonna kill me. I tore some of the pages from their book when I was translating my panic ender to your dad.”

“*Your wha—*” Tubbo started but then was immediately cut off as Ranboo dragged him out of the room.

Wilbur nudged the blonde in front of him when he finished brushing out his hair. As Tommy ran his fingers through the soft strands, Wilbur suggested, “Tommy, why don’t you go wake Techno while I make sure Dad didn’t oversleep?”

Tommy froze. *Oh boy.*

Nope. No. I can do this. I can fucking do it. I’m my own fucking hypeman.

Tommy shoved his feelings down and replaced them with newfound semi-faux confidence as he proclaimed to himself once more. *I can do this.*

“Ok,” Tommy croaked. Wilbur helped the boy up to his feet and the two left the room. He pointed out which room was Techno’s and told him he’d see him in the kitchen later. And as he watched Wilbur walk off the other way, it suddenly hit Tommy.

Today is his birthday.

He was sixteen years old. He stuttered to a halt at the realization. *Sixteen.*

This was his first birthday ever away from the tower. From his home. From Dream.

A spark of rebellion simmered in his gut and he grinned. *I’m going to have the greatest day ever and nobody can stop me. He can’t stop me. I’m free.*

With that revelation, he beelined down the hallway to Techno’s door and knocked on the door quickly before his anxiety could catch up to him. As soon as he knocked he felt a wave of nausea that he swallowed back as fast as he could. A gruff voice, still reeking of sleep sounded from the other side of the door, “Who is it?”

“It’s uh...It’s Tommy.” He tried to keep his voice steady.

There was a long moment of silence before Techno responded, “Come in.”

Oh, well I wasn't expecting that, okay.

Tommy twisted the doorknob open and slid inside the room.

Techno's room was surprisingly simple, minimalistic even. A large bed sat on the right side with a dark red canopy. there was a fireplace and a large oaken desk with thick stacks of documents organized neatly to the side.

What struck Tommy as odd however was the small golden bell that sat on the other side of the desk.

Wonder what that's for...

Techno was sitting at his desk, his long hair tied up in a ponytail. His normally crimson eyes seemed duller today, melancholic. He had dark bags beneath his eyes from what Tommy assumed to be a lack of sleep. Tommy fiddled with his hands nervously as he gave him a wobbly smile.

Techno to his credit smiled back, but it didn't quite reach his eyes.

"Wilbur says to get ready to go...um we're meeting in the kitchen so uh...yeah." Tommy lingered in the doorway, ready to dart off before things could get more awkward. "I'll get out of your hair then."

"Tommy." Techno stopped him and the teen tensed, bracing for rejection. Techno stood from his desk and leaned against it. He pinched the bridge of his nose with his fingers and sighed, "Look I'm...I'm really sorry about last night. I didn't mean to make you worry or to make you feel like you'd done anything wrong...I just..."

Tommy bit against his cheek, his hands suddenly feeling shaky. "I-It's fine, Techno. I shouldn't have been down there. Following disembodied voices after all, kinda seems like it should be on a list of ways to get mucked."

Techno frowned.

“No, you’re fine to explore. *Well, maybe not in the middle of the night. And yeah, you probably shouldn’t follow voices in the dark.* It’s just...that room...” Techno let out an airy laugh and waved him in. “Gods come in, you look like you’re two seconds away from bolting.”

Tommy shrugged. “*I mean...*”

“I’m not mad at you, Tom. You didn’t kn...I mean you...you were just... sorry I’m bad at this.” Techno’s shoulders slumped and he sighed.

Tommy let out a light laugh, shut the door behind him, and walked further into the room. Techno met him in the middle and Tommy saw him fiddling with the end of his ponytail.

Looking closely, Tommy could still see that same haunted look from last night in his eyes. Tommy frowned. “What’s wrong, then?”

For a moment, Techno's eyes seemed like they were screaming some muted message to him with how they widened. The man opened his mouth to speak but at the last second, he sighed and deflated. “It was just that room, Tommy. That room is painful for me. Especially today. I don’t want you to worry about it. I’ll cheer up, okay?”

He’s not telling the truth.

Can't really judge him for that, can I?

So instead of calling him out on it, Tommy simply smiled weakly and nodded. “If you say so, big guy.”

Techno stared at him for a long moment and Tommy felt his stomach churn when he *still* saw that the look in his eyes from last night was still there. It hadn’t diminished at all, despite what Techno said. “Give me five minutes to get ready okay? Just wait outside the door.”

“Sure thing.”

With that, Tommy left and sighed when he felt the door click shut behind him. He let the back of his head thud lightly against the wall and frowned. It seemed that fixing things was going to be harder than he thought. *It would be easier if I just knew what he was mad about.*

“So. You’re Tommy, ey?”

The deep voice coming from his right caused Tommy to jolt harshly from his thoughts and sent him stumbling a few feet. As he tried to regain his bearings, his ankle caught against the rug and he fell. Instead of picking himself up, Tommy looked up and growled, “Fuck, man! Don’t scare people like that!”

A man stared back at him with wine-red eyes that reminded Tommy of a snake strangely enough. He wore a long black leather tailcoat with a red sash tied around his waist. He had on simple black boots and black trousers. Bits of gold accentuated the tailcoat and the black gloves he wore.

The ram-horned man looked him up and down for a moment before he sneered at him. Tommy did his best to keep his expression cross even though at that moment he wanted nothing more than to shrink into himself. He raised an eyebrow at him and spoke, “Phil was right, you are a jumpy one....”

Suddenly it dawned on him. This was Tubbo’s father.

“And you’re an asshole. Isn’t scaring kids a bit beneath you?” Tommy hissed, feeling insecure all of a sudden. The thought that maybe insulting his friend’s father wasn’t the best idea briefly flitted across his mind, but only briefly.

The brunette, with hair the exact same shade as Tubbo’s merely chuckled and held out a hand to the boy. “Not at all. I had to make a good first impression.”

Tommy scowled but accepted the hand, letting the man pull him to his feet. The ram let go and grinned. “The name is Jschlatt. I’m the Chancellor of L’manburg and Tubbo’s father. Though by

your glare, I suspect you knew that already.”

This time it was Tommy’s turn to raise a brow. “Chancellor? Am I supposed to know what that is? Sounds fake, to be honest.”

Schlatt’s expression didn’t waver. Instead, he responded, “You’ve got quite the edge on that sharp tongue of yours.”

“It’s part of my charm,” Tommy fired back.

Suddenly Schlatt smiled, it was small but it was there. The chancellor nodded and his voice became softer, “Good. Make sure it stays sharp. It’s a strong weapon.”

Huh?

Schlatt raised his hand out to Tommy and said, “It’s nice to meet you, Tommy.”

Tommy wrinkled his nose, but took his hand and shook it. “A pleasure. I remember you from the library. You dragged Tubbo out by his ankles practically.”

“By his ear, technically,” Schlatt laughed and then winced. “Not my best parenting moment, I’ll admit. But he scared me to death. He’s too young to be going off on his own like that.”

A soft side. Tommy had to admit, he hadn’t expected that. He had been fully prepared to write of Schlatt as a self-absorbed asshole, not two minutes after meeting him, but perhaps he was wrong.

“Tubbo can handle himself,” Tommy protested. “He’s strong.”

“He’s the strongest person I know. But he’s still my kid,” Schlatt rebuked, entirely genuine.

Tommy widened his eyes, mildly taken aback.

“Schlatt, stop scaring Tommy,” A voice called and Tommy turned to see Phil walking up to the two.

Tommy’s jaw dropped in amazement as he took in the sight of the massive crow wings trailing behind the Emperor. They were dark as the night, with the notable exception of a large patch of white feathers at the top of one of his wings. It stood out like a sore thumb but it was by no means ugly. It was fierce and intimidating.

“I would *never*,” Schlatt said with mock offense.

“He absolutely would and did,” Tommy said, eyes still locked onto Phil’s wings. “You should fire him.”

Phil smiled at Tommy’s astonished expression and stood next to Schlatt, eyeing him with faux contempt. “Believe me I’ve tried getting rid of him, he’s like a parasite.”

“But I’m your favorite parasite. Besides, you’d miss Tubbo too much if I left,” Schlatt pointed out and Philza sighed.

“You’ve got me there. Sorry, Tommy, the parasite stays,” Phil conceded and then patted Tommy sympathetically on the back.

“Damn. Worth a shot.” Tommy shrugged.

“Alright, half-pint let’s go bef—*oh*.” Techno opened the door and paused at the sight of the three men crowding his doorway. “What’s going on here?”

“Tommy’s trying to sack me,” Schlatt said, not even bothering to look offended.

Techno snorted and slung what looked like a violin case around his shoulder and onto his back. “About time someone around here tried to.”

“Can’t get any respect around here,” Schlatt grumbled half-heartedly. “Just make sure my kid makes it home before dark, please. Nice to meet you again, Tommy. Welcome to L’manburg.” With that, the chancellor walked off leaving just Tommy, Techno, and Phil.

Phil turned to the two, his eyes flitting over the two worriedly and he sighed. “*Please*, come back this time. *All three of you*. I *really* don’t want to have to send search parties out tonight.”

Even for me?

“We’ll be back before the lanterns, Dad. Promise,” Techno assured him and Phil’s shoulders relaxed.

He gently pressed his hand to the side of Techno’s face for a long moment and said, “Sometimes I forget how much you’ve grown, my son.”

“You’re getting sentimental in your old age, Phil,” Techno mused but only leaned more into the touch.

“I’m not even physically forty, fuck off.” Phil thumped his forehead and then turned to Tommy.

His expression softened as he spoke earnestly, “Be back safe, Tommy. I mean it. Stay close to Wilbur and Techno and they’ll get you home just fine.”

Which home are you referring to?

Tommy nodded, his throat tight. “Will do, Philza Minecraft.”

Phil chuckled.

“Oh, *come on*, Q. Just an hour. The kitchen won’t self-destruct without you,” Wilbur whined, sliding around the counter after the dark-haired hybrid. Quackity scoffed and continued stirring the pot in front of him, trying to ignore the way the prince was leaning up *extremely close* beside him.

“You don’t know my kitchen staff very well then. I don’t have time to watch you stumble over your own feet, Your Highness.”

Wilbur pouted and tilted his head more towards the winged man. “Now you know me better than to lie about that. I’m an excellent dancer, Q. I’d never let you fall. And you know that don’t you, birdie?”

Wilbur grinned at the way Quackity’s ears burned red at the nickname. Quackity’s eyes darted away for a moment before the shot back and then he scowled. “I am going to throw this ladle at you.”

“Aw, now that’s not very nice, is it?” Wilbur teased.

“Maybe I’ll just throw the whole pot,” Quackity threatened, trying to ignore the way Wilbur had a hand slightly hovering over his waist.

“Rude.”

Quackity rolled his eyes and as he was turning to get back to the work, Wilbur took the ladle gently from his hand and slowly turned the shorter man back around to face him. Quackity huffed and crossed his arms.



Wilbur's expression softened and he handed him back the ladle. Quackity's fingers brushed lightly atop his own till they found their own grip. Wilbur let go and then implored, "Just an hour. That's all I ask. Charlie will have fun and all of us will be there. You deserve a break. You work too hard."

"You are insufferable." Quackity glared and Wilbur already knew he was probably cursing his name internally.

"*You love it,*" Wilbur whispered with a shit-eating grin plastered across his face.

"Fuck you."

"Is that a yes?" The prince's face was inches from his own.

"If it'll get you out of my hair for a few hours so I can finish lunch, then yes," Quackity spat and then shoved his face away with his hand.

Wilbur swiftly grabbed Quackity's hand before he could retract it and pressed his lips to his knuckles. "Thank you, Q. I promise you won't regret it."

Quackity turned his face away, trying to hide the fact his cheeks were a bright red. Finally, he sighed, letting his act slip a bit. "I suppose getting some air couldn't hurt."

Suddenly the sound of someone clearing their throat cut through the tension and Wilbur growled when they spoke, "Oi, lovebirds. Daylight's burning."

God fucking dammit, Techno.

"Oh, so that's where my headache went," Wilbur groaned and let his head briefly drop to rest on Quackity's shoulder. He grumbled quietly in Quackity's ear for a long moment before he pulled away and turned to where Techno and Tommy were looking at him rather smugly.

Quackity chuckled at Wilbur's red ears and then patted the man on the shoulder. He then leaned close and whispered into his ear, "And now you have not just one *but two*. Aren't you the lucky one, *cariño*?"

With that Quackity walked off, briefly greeting Tommy and Techno with a middle finger as he passed by. Wilbur huffed and pushed himself upright. He marched up to his twin and exclaimed, "Do you want me to end up sad and alone? Is that it?"

Techno simply rolled his eyes and scoffed, "*Please*. That's been a given for twenty-two years now. I'm just trying to break it to you slowly."

Wilbur swatted the back of his twin's head and Tommy chuckled. The teen turned to the two and said, "We ran into Phil and uh-Schlatt on the way here. He said to come home on time this time."

"Yes, yes, of course. Old man doesn't need any more years taken off his life. We'll be back before the lights start," Wilbur promised, briefly stopping to fix Tommy's brooch which was upside somehow.

"We will?" Tommy quirked his head, the gesture not fazing him in the slightest.

"Remember? We told you we have a special spot to show you." Techno reminded, slinging his satchel around his hip and readjusting his violin onto his back.

"You gonna say where or..?" Tommy asked while taking a minute to make sure his wings were covered by the cloak.

"Nope," Wilbur said, popping the 'P'. He smiled. "It's a surprise. Now let's get a move on, I know a good food stand around."

"Lead the way, then," Tommy replied, giddiness welling up in his chest.

With that, the three set off.

It didn't take the three long to maneuver their way out of the palace and back down the narrow alleyways they'd come from. Not that Tommy really remembered any of it. He'd been rather incapacitated at the time. The warm feeling of embarrassment at the memory burned his ears and Tommy tried his best to distract him by focusing on the streets around him. It wasn't super busy yet as it was still a ways away from dusk but already people had begun to celebrate. As they drew near the square, Tommy felt his heart start to flutter.

He felt his wings begin to twitch excitedly beneath his coat as he began to hear music and even more people. Decorations were strung throughout the streets, painting the city with the sigil of L'manburg and what seemed to be the family crest for the royal family. The whole city seemed to be alive with energy.

He'd never seen anything like it. He'd never seen so many people. He'd never seen so much joy and sorrow gathered in one place.

He'd never seen such love for a lost prince. He'd never seen such love for anyone.

And though they tried to hide it, Tommy could see that same sorrow in the eyes of Wilbur and Technoblade. Tommy looked around again at the hundreds of flags, flowers, and lights surrounding him, he could see that this festival was a giant extravagant reminder of what they'd lost.

But for Tommy, it was his dream and had been since the first moment he'd seen those lanterns rise into the sky like a beacon of hope. The dream to finally be free of the place he'd been trapped in for so *long*. The dream to be free.

For Tommy, this was *everything*.

But for the twins? Perhaps this was their own personal hell. And yet they had decided to bear it *for him*.

"Come on. Can you smell that?" Wilbur asked, nudging his shoulder. Tommy inhaled deeply and sighed as the smell of freshly baked bread flooded his senses.

As if on cue his stomach growled and Wilbur laughed, “I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Techno, stop tuning that thing and move your ass.” Wilbur turned to his twin and eyed the artfully crafted violin in his hands.

“Almost done,” Techno sighed and twisted another knob ever so slightly. “Go feed the child. I’ll catch up in a second.”

Wilbur mock saluted his brother and then slung an arm over Tommy’s shoulders, not noticing the way Tommy’s wings twitched slightly at the movement. He knew that his wings hadn’t sparked again but he could still feel the warmth they radiated against his back. “C’mon kid, let’s leave the nerd to his own devices.”

Tommy looked back for a brief moment with a sad expression. He knew already that there was a distance between him and Techno that hadn’t been there yesterday. And yet despite that, Techno seemed to be hovering over him today, never letting the teen out of his line of sight for more than a few minutes. It was as if Techno feared that if he did look away, Tommy would vanish. Red eyes met his own and some of the fog cleared from his expression. The prince weakly smiled and mouthed, “*Go on.*”

Tommy was starting to wonder if Techno might disappear too. He nodded to the man and let Wilbur lead him away.

Eventually, Wilbur and Tommy stood in line to get some bread and fruit for the day, Wilbur fished out a handful of silver while Tommy leaned his head back a bit to bask in what was a surprisingly warm sun for April.

“No, no. You can’t eat that silly!” The voice of a child caught Tommy’s attention. He turned his gaze over and spotted a young girl, holding up a small flower to a baby who was trying his best to shove it in his mouth.

The girl giggled and held up the flower again for the baby to see. She then set it gently on the stone step she was sitting on and said in a proud voice, “It’s for the lost prince. Do you see? All of these flowers. All of these gifts are for *him*.”

The Lost Prince. Theseus.

That's when Tommy noticed that there wasn't just one flower crowding around the archway but probably thousands, all of different colors and types. A rainbow of sympathy for a child long dead. Yet despite this, he failed to see a memorial anywhere at least until he looked up.

Tommy sputtered a gasp.

Before him, stood a mosaic. Far larger than any painting or sculpture he'd ever seen. It seemed to tower above him and the common folk surrounding him. Yet it wasn't the size of the mural that surprised him.

It was what it depicted.

The twins, maybe six or seven years old caught his eye first. Techno's hair was much shorter but it was still tied into a small braid that nearly fell over his shoulder. The scar that nicked over his nose was still there and he wore a small smile as he looked on at his twin. Wilbur seemed equally as happy, though he seemed to bear his emotions more so than his brother as he wore an adoring smile. Wilbur's eyes seemed to sparkle as crimson eyes trailed up the mural to... Tommy froze.

Phil came into view, much younger and his face alight with joy and love. His blue eyes seemed to burn through Tommy. But that wasn't what knocked the air from Tommy's lungs. Sitting in Phil's arms was a small infant with golden blonde hair and bright blue eyes. And as the final nail in the coffin, hanging off of the infant's blanket was an emerald necklace. Suddenly it seemed Tommy's pocket was ten times heavier.

Theseus.

Wilbur never mentioned that Theseus was blonde... Tommy had just assumed he'd had dark hair or even *pink hair*. In hindsight, it should have been obvious because of Phil. *Techno had even said Theseus looked a lot like me. Guess he was right.*

He quirked his head quizzically to the side as he tried to take a closer look at the baby.

There's...There's something about him...

Something...

Tommy looked up at the last figure in the painting, a woman standing beside Phil. She had long dark hair that fell to her waist. It had been beautifully decorated with dozen upon dozens of purple flowers that seemed almost natural in her hair. Her gown shimmered like stars and while she seemed incredibly out of place compared to the others in the mural, she also looked like there was no other place she could've possibly belonged except by her family.

So this was Wilbur and Techno's mother. Phil's wife. The Goddess of Death.

The one member of the royal family that Tommy had yet to meet. What struck him as odd was that neither Wilbur nor Techno had ever mentioned her. Nobody had.

Tommy took a shaky step forward, losing his spot in line as he moved toward the mural unconsciously. He stared up at the Empress. She had a hand on Techno's shoulder and was staring down at Theseus with soft violet eyes that shone with as much love as a mural could depict.

And yet Tommy could feel it as if it was the warm sun beating down against his face. He closed his eyes and sucked in a breath as sunshine filled his lungs.

"Your majesty?" A woman with thick white and brown hair called out. Tommy sat in her arms as she carried him.

What he remembered the most was how warm it was that day. The woman holding him smiled. "I have a certain someone who wants to see you."

Tommy turned—no was that Tommy?

The child turned and his expression grew joyful as he spotted a woman walking in the gardens, a book in hand.

He reached out for her and squirmed as hard as he could to get out of the lady's grasp.

The mother turned and her face brightened as she spotted the toddler. She shut her book and hastily started to make her way toward him, her arms stretched out to catch him.

"Theseus, my darling." She spoke with such love and affection that Tommy almost didn't recognize the name she had said, too caught up in the warmth of the voice.

Wait...did she just call me—?

The mother caught the toddling boy in her arms and lifted him up, pressing her forehead against his as she cooed, "Oh, my own heart. My dear boy. My sweetheart."

The child grinned. "Mum-ma!"

His mother—no...wait what is happening? She pressed gentle kisses to his forehead, his cheek, his nose, eventually settling on nuzzling the child's nose with her own.

"I missed you my little bird."

Tommy slammed back into reality, stumbling backward. He would have fallen had a hand not clamped tightly around his shoulder steadied him. Tommy looked up and saw Wilbur not looking at him, but staring up at the mural with a pained expression.

"Come on...Tommy let's go. I-I d-don't..." Wilbur's voice wavered as he stared at his little brother and mother's mural. "I'd forgotten that they'd built this for them. Fuck."

"Wait...them?" Tommy asked, still reeling from whatever the fuck he'd seen.

But it felt real. He was real. And I was...No, that doesn't make any sense.

None of this does.

“Theseus wasn’t the only person I lost that night...” Wilbur explained in a hushed tone, his voice strained tight and grieving.

The woman in the mural. The Empress.

Was she who I hear—

“Wilbur! Tommy!” Tommy turned and saw Techno waving the two over, his hair blowing lightly in the wind as he held up his violin. Wilbur shook himself out of his head and dragged Tommy away from the memorial without another word. Tommy was about to cry out in retaliation, still reeling from whatever his brain had just decided to show him. But the image of Wilbur’s pained expression flashed in his mind and he let himself be dragged off.

One thought though echoed in his mind before he let the mural out of his sight.

That woman.

The Empress, whoever the hell that was in that weird vision. That’s who I heard calling me last night.

Chapter End Notes

What is it with every time I get ill that I just fill a chapter with TNTduo just PINING for one another?

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you liked the art for this chapter consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on twitter, tumblr, tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

I See the Light

Chapter Notes

LFGGGGGGG ITS TGP TIME

TW: None

Word Count: 10.2k

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart<3
<https://www.instagram.com/arbitersart/?hl=en>

ON ANOTHER NOTE. ARBITER MADE ME A WHOLE ANIMATIC ABOUT TGP FOR CHRISTMAS!!! GO WATCH IT RN!!!
<https://youtu.be/0e9fh6BahTw>

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Did you finish tuning it?” Wilbur asked, clearly trying to move on from the mural as soon as possible. Techno nodded.

“I think so. I might need to test it out a bit, it’s been a while since I’ve played,” Techno stated. Meanwhile, Tommy seemed slightly startled, like he was still trying to pull himself out of his own head. He watched as his eyes darted around for a moment, taking in whatever detail he could, and then he eyed a flower cart.

Tommy looked back at Techno and more importantly, at his hair which was hanging loosely at his waist. Tommy gave a smile that strangely didn’t reach his eyes and tugged at Wilbur’s shoulder. “Wil, Wil, Wilbur. Wilbur Watson. Teach me how to braid Techno’s hair. I want to put flowers in it.”

“*Heh?*” Techno sputtered. “Do I get a say in this?”

Wilbur’s eyes flashed deviously at first then settled into a soft fondness. “Nope. It’s Tommy’s day. Kid gets to do what he wants.”

Tommy bounced up and down excitedly and grabbed at Techno's arm. "C'mon, it'll keep it out of your face while you play, please? I really want to learn!"

"Oh, that is so unfair," Techno huffed and Wilbur cackled.

Not ten minutes later, the three of them had parked themselves by the fountain with Wilbur and Tommy sitting on the seat while Techno sat in front of them on the ground. His violin rested against his shoulder while his bow sat loosely atop the strings. Techno leisurely tested each note quietly and methodically as gentle, yet clumsy fingers weaved through his hair.

"Okay now take the left piece and cross it over the center one. Good, now pull it tight..." Wilbur instructed Tommy slowly, allowing the kid to learn at his own pace. "Now what you want to do is grab some more hair and add it to the braid, and then take the right pieces and fold it over the new centerpiece."

Tommy furrowed his brow as he focused and grabbed a few more loose strands of hair and pulled it into the braid. He pulled it tight, but not painfully so, and then repeated the process again on the right.

"See? Easy, right? Now just repeat that over and over till you run out of hair. If you mess up? That's okay, just try again. It takes practice." Wilbur smiled and then hopped down to the ground to sit by his twin. He held the little basket of flowers he'd bought for Tommy in his lap and monitored Tommy's progress as well as his surroundings.

Children ran by, waving flags in the air while their parents attempted to chase them down. People danced freely in the street, still careful to avoid stepping on numerous chalk drawings that had been etched into the pavement by adults and children alike. Wilbur looked up for a moment and noticed a woman with shoulder-length vibrant red hair sitting in the middle of it all. Her arms and knees were covered in a rainbow of chalk and she seemed as though she was deeply focused on her creation. Wilbur swallowed.

She was drawing Theseus.

Theseus, still in toddlerhood with his hair blending into the bed of golden flowers he rested in. His eyes were alight with joy and he seemed unafraid. Peaceful, even. A startling contrast to what Wilbur remembered being the last moments of his life. The girl looked up for a moment and for a brief second, the two stared at one another. Her blue eyes bore into his own until she gave him a

small knowing smile. And then a voice called out her name and Wilbur watched as another woman with short brown hair grabbed her by her hands and tugged her to her feet, seemingly unbothered by the chalk as they walked off, leaving the drawing unfinished.

Wilbur turned away.

“Okay wait, I’ve run out of hair, now what?” Tommy interrupted and Wilbur turned to see Tommy’s progress. Wilbur had to admit. It was pretty damn good for his first try.

“Okay, now just weave the rest together like a normal braid and then tie it off at the end,” Wilbur explained and then snatched the hair tie off of his brother’s hand. Techno hissed and batted him away but let him take the tie. He tossed it to Tommy who caught it easily and slipped it onto his wrist.

Wilbur snickered quietly when he noticed Tommy’s tongue poking out in concentration as he focused to braid the rest of Techno’s hair. He finally got to the bottom and quickly tied it off. Tommy beamed and crossed his legs under himself and leaned back a bit to look at his work.

“I got it!” Tommy cheered and Wilbur felt Tommy’s enthusiasm infect his own and he grinned.

“Nice job, kid. Tech, what do you think?”

Techno set down his violin for a moment and ran his hand over the braid. His eyes glinted fondly. He nodded in approval and went back to tuning. Tommy touched the braid for a moment and then opened his hand up to Wilbur and eyed the flower basket.

As Wilbur started handing Tommy flowers for him to weave into Techno’s hair, Techno’s meaningless notes finally began to take shape into a melody.

“What’s that you’re playing?” Wilbur asked, unfamiliar with the song.

Techno shrugged. “It’s an older piece I found in the library that I thought sounded nice.” Techno’s body jerked with every crisp note he played and Tommy’s nose wrinkled as he struggled to place

flowers.

That was until the teen stiffened as he listened to Techno's piece. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Wait! I know this song! I have the piano bit from one of my music books. There are lyrics to it too!"

"Do you know them?" Techno asked and Tommy ducked his head, embarrassed.

"I...might," Tommy trailed, suddenly intensely focused on placing flowers.

"It's only us, Tom, besides if you're bad I'll just play over you," Techno teased.

Tommy rolled his eyes. "You underestimate my ability to shout."

"As much as I'd love to get my eardrums blown out by the two of you, I have to say I'd much rather hear Tommy sing than cause a public disturbance. But that's just me," Wilbur said curiously.

Tommy's ears went red but he sucked in a breath and grumbled, "I suppose I could but if you make fun of me I'll shank the both of you."

Techno chuckled, "I'd expect nothing less from you, kid."

Satisfied with that response, Tommy let his eyes flutter shut and began to sing.

I am a fish inside a birdcage

My brother always sings me songs

And with his beak he tries to soothe me

He makes me feel that I belong

He has a wild imagination

*And tells me things that must be true
Like there's a world where I can take flight
Where I can freely move*

*So carry me from these walls, brother of mine
Show me the world outside
It has to be true
I'm counting on you
To be my wings and my eyes.*

Tommy exhaled as he finished and after a moment he peeked open an eye to look at the twins.

“I can’t believe you said you weren’t good,” Techno huffed, his bow dropping to stare at Tommy in awe. The teen ducked his head further, this time bashfully.

“I didn’t really have a good definition of ‘good’ y’know? Singing is kind of an absentminded trait of mine. I just mimicked piano notes until I could sing them, and then the lyrics that went along with some pieces.”

Wilbur’s eyes widened and he whipped up his head to look at Tommy. “*Dude. You taught yourself perfect pitch. What the fuck?*”

“I don’t know what that means, but cool. Now hand me another flower,” Tommy said, his attention already focused back on Techno’s hair. Wilbur rolled his eyes half-heartedly but obliged.

The three settled into a comfortable pattern after that. Wilbur would hand off flowers to Tommy while Techno would play any specific piece that came to mind. And if they had lyrics that either Wilbur or Tommy knew, they would sing it.

After a bit, Wilbur set out a pouch for people to throw money into, and sure enough, people did. It wasn’t that he was going to keep the money, he never did. He always gave it away to someone who needed it.

The three were in the middle of a mid-afternoon lunch break when the tip of a child's boot kicked against his own. Wilbur looked up and his face brightened at the vividly green eyes that stared back at him.

"Quackity said you're trying to scam people out of their money," Charlie said impishly, his hands linked behind his back.

Wilbur rolled his eyes. "Oh really?" Wilbur stood to his feet and hooked his hands under Charlie's arms, hoisting him up. He held him out for a moment and grinned. "Now tell me what he really said, kid."

Charlie giggled and cupped his hands to his face and whispered to Wilbur, "He's excited to see you and he's glad he came."

Wilbur's expression softened and he set the boy down to ruffle his hair. "And that's why you're my favorite little double agent, Charlie."

Charlie nodded. "You'd both be lost without me."

"What was that, mijo?" Quackity's voice caused Wilbur's head to snap up and he felt the familiar flood of butterflies in his chest at the sight of the man who was eyeing him with the same intensity.

Heat burned at his ears and he heard Tommy giggle behind him. Wilbur whipped around and growled at both his brother and Tommy, "*Not a word from either of you.*"

Tommy at least had the decency to raise his hands in surrender. Techno merely raised an eyebrow, but then his expression broke for a brief second to reveal his twin's support.

"Nothing!" Charlie chirped and then moved to hide behind Tommy who seemed moderately surprised by the action.

Suddenly Techno stood to his feet and said, “Oh, look over there. Tommy, Charlie, follow me to this random spot for no reason in particular.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes. But grinned when he saw Techno hoist Charlie onto his back and bring the two boys over to a food stand that sold cupcakes.

Quackity walked over to him and leaned heavily on his hip as he spoke. “Wilbur.”

Wilbur deftly grabbed a blue flower from Tommy’s basket and handed it to the golden-winged man. He bowed slightly and said, “Quackity.”

Quackity gently plucked the flower from his hands and tucked it behind his ear. Wilbur’s face burned and Quackity grinned and leaned close. “*Bonito.*”

“You are going to be the death of me.” Wilbur shook his head and linked his hand with Quackity’s, dragging him back towards the others.

Quackity laughed.

“Wait, explain it to me again. You found Charlie, *where?*” Tommy asked while he examined a tiny embroidered version of the L’manburg flag in his hands that Wilbur had bought him.

“I caught him trying to sneak food out of the kitchen pantry. I must have left the door open that night and he snuck in,” Quackity explained, and Tommy saw him look over at his ward who was currently playing with a spinning top on the ground. “I heard something fall and when I went to check, there he was, drenched from the rain with a wad of cheese and bread in his mouth. He was about four.”

Tommy wrinkled his nose, his eyes a bit sad. “What happened after that?”

“It took me a while to coax him out of the pantry but eventually I got him to let me dry him off. Kid was *freezing* and then once I’d warmed him up he became feverish,” Quackity trailed off, his eyes lost for a long moment. “It was a long night. I knew I wasn’t going to send him to an orphanage so I made him my apprentice.”

Suddenly Wilbur coughed loudly. “*Mijo.*”

“*Cállate, pendejo,*” Quackity hissed.

Tommy laughed and turned back to look down at the flag. He flexed the cloth in his hands and smiled. The fabric was soft and the pattern of the L’manburg flag seemed familiar. He was sure he’d probably seen it around the kingdom but something about it...tugged at something.

Tommy shook his head subtly. *I had just about enough of that for today.*

He wasn’t sure what these...hallucinations? Visions? He wasn’t sure *whatever* these were, but they were fucking with him.

...Memory...no...hallucinations sounds more accurate. Does it? Fuck, I don’t know!

His head had felt so...scrambled since he’d left the tower. Nothing seemed to fit correctly in his mind anymore.

Everything just seemed...

“Tubbo Underscore, *do not!*” Tommy jumped slightly at the voice and whipped around to see Tubbo grimacing at Ranboo while holding what seemed to be a tiny horn. Tommy quickly realized his goal had been to scare the wits out of the blonde and he breathed out a sigh of relief. His reaction probably wouldn’t have been as funny as Tubbo had hoped. Tommy tossed Ranboo a grateful smile.

Tubbo sighed and shoved the horn back into Ranboo’s hand before muttering, “Killjoy.”

Ranboo rolled their eyes at the horned boy while Tubbo simply slung an arm around Tommy's shoulders.

"Hey, you made it!" Tommy exclaimed.

"We told you we would." Tubbo grinned and squeezed his shoulder.

"Hey, there you two are, we were starting to think you weren't going to show," Wilbur said.

"Your Highnesses. Sorry for the delay, we had to stop by Aimsey's shop to grab something for tonight," Tubbo explained while Ranboo plucked a flower from Techno's braid and tucked it behind one of his ears. Techno subtly acknowledged the prince with a small smile but his expression was still stoic as it had been most of the day. Tommy's gut churned at the far-off look in his eye.

Tubbo's head suddenly snapped up and his expression brightened, he tugged on Ranboo's hand. "Oh shit, dude. C'mon Boo, let's go!"

"W-Wait Tubbo I—" Ranboo yelped as they were pulled away from their spot. They reached out desperately to Tommy and cried, "Tommy, help!"

"What are they..." Tommy began and then trailed off for it was then that Tommy realized he could hear music. He peered behind Wilbur to see a few musicians had begun to play in the courtyard, drawing in a handful of people to come and dance. Something stirred in Tommy's chest and he grinned.

"They're dancing..." Tommy said with awe and then stifled a laugh when he spotted Tubbo and Ranboo awkwardly trying to find their rhythm to the jovial song that was playing. Wilbur leaned his arm on Tommy's shoulder and snorted.

"Not very well by the looks of it. Ranboo's height seems to be handicapping Tubbo a bit."

Tommy rolled his eyes fondly and then turned down to where Charlie was sitting on the ground eyeing the dancers with a yearning expression. As if he wanted to dance too but was too shy to go by himself. Tommy knelt by him and stretched out a hand to the boy. "C'mon, I'll be your partner."

Charlie looked at the hand for a long moment before looking at Tommy. Then his face brightened, and he nodded eagerly, taking it in his own. Tommy pulled the boy to his feet and led him into the crowd to join in.

Wilbur smiled as he watched the two spin around into the crowd, effortlessly melding in with the other dancers. Tommy's expression was brighter than the sun and Wilbur was certain this was the most he'd ever seen the boy smile. He was laughing and having the time of his life as he danced with Charlie who was giggling and chatting with the blonde with more confidence than ever before. Tommy was finally getting the chance to be a teenager. It warmed his heart to see him so happy.

He felt someone poke against his side and turned to see Quackity cock his head and grin at him. "Well, Your Highness, you gonna stand there looking all pretty and doe-eyed or are you going to make good on your invitation?"

Wilbur leaned in a bit, catching the shorter man off guard, and teased, "Aw, you think I'm pretty?"

"*Hermoso*," Quackity said without hesitation, and before Wilbur could reply he heard Techno gag behind him.

"Please go be gay literally anywhere else," Techno groaned, his violin at his shoulder and his bow ready to play.

"You coming, Tech?" Wilbur asked, ignoring his pestering. Techno shook his head.

"You know I hate crowds. I'd much rather play." With that Techno effortlessly joined in with the musicians, blending his violin in perfectly with the melody. The other musicians seemed surprised that the prince was joining but they didn't question it.

Quackity grabbed Wilbur's tie, forcing back the prince's attention to him. He tugged him down to his height and dragged him into the dance. Their noses brushed together for a moment before

Quackity intertwined Wilbur's fingers with his own. Their knees knocked together and Wilbur let out a breathless laugh as he placed his hand on Quackity's hip and led the pair into the dance.

"You better not let me fall." Quackity panicked for a moment, and Wilbur saw his eyes flicker over to where Charlie and Tommy were still dancing together before turning back to Wilbur.

"Wouldn't dream of it," Wilbur replied with a wink as they moved to the music.

Time seemed to slow and fly by all at the same time and Wilbur's lungs inhaled deeply as he focused on keeping up with the dance. Quackity let out a laugh as Wilbur spun him, his eyes fluttering shut for a brief moment in a joyful and bashful expression. He exhaled.

He looked around at all he saw around him and smiled. Techno's face was furrowed in concentration as he moved his body in time with his violin, though Wilbur still saw a small smile on his face. His eyes were trained on Tommy, who seemed to have switched partners with Ranboo at some point. The emotions on his face were like words on a page for Wil to read as he chatted happily to Ranboo, whose expression mirrored his. Charlie was being spun around by Tubbo who for the first time in eleven years seemed finally free from the sadness of Theseus' birthday.

Even if only for that moment. And then Wilbur realized. They all were free. Tommy, by simply being himself and giving him a reason to not lock himself in his room all day, had set them free for one long blissful dance that seemed to stop time altogether.

Wilbur had never felt more alive.

A hand came up to wipe tears from his cheek and Wilbur looked down to see Quackity frowning, his brow knit with concern. He spoke softly, "Don't cry. It breaks my heart to see you sad."

Wilbur gave a wet laugh and assured him, "I'm happy, not sad, birdie. Don't worry about me. I'm so happy right now."

The avian nodded in understanding after a moment and Quackity smiled, his brown eyes warm and earnest. "He'd be so proud of you. I'm proud of you, Wilbur."

Wilbur slowed their dance a bit to press his forehead to Quackity's. He gave him a wobbly smile.
"Thank you, Q."

The two let their breath intertwine for a moment longer before Wilbur regained his composure and pulled Quackity back into the fun.

Tommy felt breathless. His lungs burned slightly but not uncomfortably from exertion but he didn't care. He was having the time of his life. He felt like he could dance forever and never grow bored.

"Spin incoming," Ranboo warned, their face just as gleeful. Tommy giggled as he twirled, his feet nearly tangling together. He stumbled slightly but Ranboo caught him before he could fall.

"Whoops, my bad." Tommy laughed but quickly recovered. His heart sang to the music and he could pick out Techno's violin from the others by the magnificent and beautiful sounds it made. It made him feel like he was flying.

He wouldn't be too surprised if he was.

This was all he'd ever wanted. *Freedom.*

The freedom to spread his wings and soar into the air as gracefully as Crow did. And even though his wings were still sitting beneath his cloak, unmoving, this was close enough.

Tommy opened his eyes to see people switching partners again. "Oop, well, have fun with Tubbo." Ranboo grinned and sent him off. In a second, he felt Tubbo crash into him, nearly sending him to the ground as they linked arms.

"Is it too late to warn you that I was barreling in?" Tubbo winced as he continued to move with the music.

Tommy shook his head exasperated, but the smile on his face felt permanently plastered on so there was no malice in it. “Dumbass.”

Tubbo pinched him and the two quickly descended into giggles as they followed the crowd yet continued their bickering. Tommy then noticed that people were leaving the dance, seemingly worn out yet still entertained enough by the shitshow left behind to stick around. Looking over, he saw Quackity and Wilbur had finally separated with Wilbur dancing with Ranboo while Quackity danced with a very tired-looking Charlie. Looking closer it seemed Charlie wasn't actually dancing at all. He had his feet atop Quackity's and was letting the older man lead them across the dance floor.

Tommy guessed the poor kid was worn out.

He looked back at Tubbo and wheezed with laughter at the ridiculousness of it all. He felt his head hit Tubbo's shoulder for a brief moment as he tried to pull himself together.

“I am not responsible if you end up eating concrete, Toms,” Tubbo proclaimed and Tommy spun him around without warning.

Tubbo yelped and Tommy replied, “The same goes for you then. If I go down, I'm taking you with me.”

“Okay, okay! Let's not kill each other.” Tubbo yielded while trying to regain his footing. Tubbo looked up at Tommy and asked, “Having fun yet?”

“I'm having the time of my life, man,” Tommy replied and Tubbo beamed. His blue eyes shone and there was that feeling again.

The familiarity of it all was back. His eyes were the color of the sea as he'd seen in his books. And they stared back at him with a love that he swore on his life he'd known before. Maybe once in a dream, but here they were again. They weren't fiction. They were real.

And he knew them. He didn't know how. It definitely didn't make sense. None of this made any fucking sense but he knew those eyes.

Tommy's breath hitched in his throat. A voice echoed faintly inside his head. *You're stepping on my feet!* The child with eyes like the sea giggled.

Tommy swallowed as another child whose irises mimicked a summer storm responded. *Get your feet out of my way then!*

The Sea and The Storm.

Tommy wondered if the thunder or the crashing wave would destroy whatever semblance of sanity his mind had left. Would it send it all crumbling to the ground? Or would Dream eventually be there to put him back together? The thought made him feel ill.

And it was in that moment Tommy knew he wasn't going back. He was already home.

Home was the horned boy with haunting eyes spinning around endlessly with him.

Home was the enderling whose soft voice and gentle nature made him feel safe from all harm.

Home was the winged man cloaked in emerald green who made him doubt every lesson Dream had ever taught him.

Home was the twins. The violinist with a warrior's spirit and a broken heart and the singer with an anguished soul who would surely catch him next.

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut and brought himself back just as Tubbo let him go to spin to his next partner. He sucked in a breath, losing himself to the music and dancing with no direction. The music hit its crescendo and Tommy's eyes shot open as he landed in Wilbur's arms.

Wilbur laughed as he caught him and quickly steadied him. The crowd erupted into applause while the two grinned at one another, trying to catch their breath. Before Wilbur could speak a voice called out, "To the boats! The ceremony begins within the hour."

Wilbur's eyes widened and he grabbed Tommy's hand, "C'mon kid, we gotta hurry. Kinda lost track of time there."

"Techno!" Tommy called, grabbing his attention. "Time to go!"

Techno briefly bid the other musicians goodbye and then shoved his violin back in its case before hurrying to their side.

"C'mon guys you too. We gotta go!" Wilbur added towards Quackity, Charlie, Tubbo, and Ranboo, already tugging Tommy along. Tommy saw Ranboo grab Tubbo by the back of his vest and pull him over causing him to yelp and swat at them. Quackity joined the group as well with Charlie fast asleep on his back.

Tommy looked back at the town square and for a moment his heart panged in sadness at leaving the jubilation of the afternoon behind. The sun was getting low in the sky and its rays seemed to wash everything in a golden light, including the countless chalk drawings on the ground, the flags strewn in the air, and the now empty square where Tommy had taken flight.

He didn't want this day to end. This was the best birthday he'd ever had. *Hell*, this had been the greatest day of his life. He felt his wings shift behind him, and felt his throat grow tight with emotion.

Tommy was sixteen years old.

And today was the first day of his life.

He felt Wilbur's hand on his shoulder and Tommy turned to see him eyeing the teen with a melancholic expression. And then he smiled. "Hey. The day isn't over yet. The best is saved for last."

Tommy's eyes shone and he nodded.

Schlatt sighed as he fiddled with the pocket watch in his hands. He saw his reflection peer back at him from the polished metal and frowned at the weariness in his expression. He set the watch down on his desk and grabbed the atlas from it. Schlatt flipped it over to the cover and ran his hand over the leather bounding.

What he had found when reading the ledger was confusing, to say the least. Schlatt wasn't sure if Tubbo was going to find the answers he'd been hoping for. With the information Tubbo had given him, something was definitely not lining up. He just hoped his son wouldn't be too disappointed.

Schlatt tucked the book under his arm and took a swig from his flask. He had a feeling he'd need the liquid courage on a night like tonight. He left his office and began to make his way down the corridor to the gallery where he'd find Phil waiting for him like he did every year.

It was like an unspoken rule to himself that he'd be there for Phil every year during the Lantern Ceremony. Nobody should have to publicly mourn their child alone.

As he exited a stairwell and into another hallway, he suddenly turned around to the sight of his son barreling full speed at him down the corridor. Actually, not at him, he wasn't even looking at him. *Now what could be so urgent to warrant this?* Schlatt stepped in his path and swung out an arm to catch the teen.

"Woah!" Tubbo gasped at the force and Schlatt held him tight as the teen nearly fell from the impact. He shifted him back to his feet and Tubbo groaned, "Ow...what the hell, man?"

"What the hell, yourself. What could possibly be so important that requires you to charge down the halls?" Schlatt chided. Tubbo frowned and then reached down to pull something out of his satchel. Suddenly Schlatt understood as the teen showed him three still-flat lanterns for the festival.

Tubbo huffed, out of breath, and said, "I had to run to get some of these to Wilbur before they took Tommy to their spot. He asked me to grab some earlier from Aimsey and I forgot to give it to him. I just wanted to make sure I made it back to Ranboo in time."

That's right. They usually head out to the courtyard with Puffy to light theirs.

Schlatt smiled. “Well, you still have plenty of time, Tubbo. No need to risk giving yourself brain damage by slamming into a wall when you inevitably trip.”

Tubbo grumbled for a moment but didn’t argue, instead, he grimaced and held his stomach. “Urgh...I think you shifted around some of my organs.”

Schlatt winced and gently ruffled the boy’s hair apologetically. “Sorry, kid. I should’ve found a better way to slow you down.”

Tubbo waved him off. “S’all good.”

Suddenly Schlatt remembered the book. “Oh, while I have you here, I found the book you were talking about.” Schlatt picked up the atlas from where it had fallen to the floor and handed it to the teen.

Tubbo gasped and snatched the book from his hands with an excited grin. “Holy shit, Dad. Thank you!”

Schlatt chuckled and then frowned slightly. “Don’t thank me yet. I read through it last night and... I’m not sure you’re going to find what you’re looking for, Tubbo.”

Tubbo’s face fell and he sounded so incredibly sad when he asked, “Was there nothing on Logstedshire?”

Schlatt shook his head and replied, “On the contrary, there was quite a lot on Logstedshire...”

With that, he began to explain all that he had learned with as much accuracy as he could. His son’s eyes grew wide once he’d finished until eventually, they filled with tears and Tubbo gasped, “Oh gods...”

“Tubbo?” Schlatt reached out and the book fell from Tubbo’s hands, thudding loudly against the wooden floor with a deafening echo.

“It was real...” Tubbo muttered and then buried his hands into his hair as he whispered, “He’s real.”

Tubbo’s head snapped upright and his voice shook violently as he repeated, “He’s real. He’s real. *He’s real.*”

“Kid?” Schlatt set his hands against his son’s shoulders which were trembling like a leaf. “What’s wrong? Did I say something? Who’s real?”

Tubbo shook his head and backed up, his eyes were wet with tears but he was still smiling. “I promise, I’ll explain everything later, but for right now, *I need to talk to Tommy.* Trust me?”

Everything within Schlatt wanted him to say no. He needed to know what was causing Tubbo such pain and he needed to know now. It broke his heart to see his kid look so grieved. But Tubbo wasn’t a baby anymore. He was sixteen and Schlatt had to let him go.

“Ok,” Schlatt answered and tugged the boy to his chest for a moment before releasing him.

Tubbo smiled tearfully and backed away. “I’ll explain everything, I promise.”

Schlatt nodded as his son ran off but he couldn’t ignore the knot that sat tight in his throat.

“Where are we going?” Tommy asked with a laugh as his hands stretched outwards. He was only slightly worried that he might bump into something as Wilbur covered his eyes. That and his curiosity were driving him up the wall.

“Be patient, Tommy. We’re almost there,” Wilbur chuckled as he led him outside. The sudden shift in temperature caused Tommy to shiver. “Alright lift your leg up here and step over. Careful now, I won’t let you fall.”

Tommy listened and then Wilbur led him a few more feet before he sighed, “After all, the best day of your life?”

Wilbur lifted his hands and Tommy gasped as all of L’manburg was revealed before him. A chill from the wind tore at him as he realized he was standing on a flat portion of the rooftop. He looked behind him and saw the window that he and Wilbur had exited from and swallowed a bit nervously as the thought of falling briefly crossed his mind. He knew he wouldn’t though. Techno and Wilbur would never let him fall.

A sole lantern of Techno’s was their only light source save for a few specks of light peppering the kingdom before him. It was people waiting for the ceremony to begin. Techno turned back briefly to wave at the teen and then pat the spot next to him. The kingdom was shrouded in darkness that Tommy knew would not last long.

“I figured you should get a decent seat.”

A smile tugged at Tommy’s lips and he exhaled. “Holy shit...”

Wilbur nudged him forward a bit, careful to keep a hand on his shoulder as the two sat down next to Techno. Tommy hooked his legs over the edge and kicked them absentmindedly. Looking down he felt a bit of relief wash over him when he saw another patch of roofing not far below him meaning there was a safety net if one of them did fall. Tommy had a feeling Phil was behind that little architectural detail.

“Yeah, Wil almost fell when we were teenagers and Dad had to come to save him. We weren’t allowed back up here till it was built.” Techno smirked.

Wilbur snorted and turned to him. “We wouldn’t have gotten caught if you hadn’t pretended to push me *and then accidentally pushed me.*”

Techno placed his hand over his heart with mock offense. “Wilbur. My dearest twin brother. Dare I say, my best friend. You must understand that I mean this from the bottom of my heart when I say...*my bad.*”

Tommy laughed weakly, his attention no longer on the twins but at the sight of the city before him. Any minute now, the lights would rise to the sky and the thing that Tommy had longed for for as long as he could remember would come true. His dream was about to come true.

He was finally here. Everything had led up to this moment. And yet it felt like he couldn’t breathe.

“Hey, you okay?” Wilbur asked, noticing that the teen had gone quiet.

Tommy’s voice was hardly above a whisper as he spoke, “*I’m terrified.*”

He ducked his head as he felt two pairs of crimson eyes burning into him with concern. Wilbur’s voice was soft as he asked, “Why?”

Why? Now that was the question of the day. Why was he so scared to have everything he ever wanted? If he was being honest? What he wanted had nothing to do with the lanterns anymore, for the most part.

It didn’t mean he didn’t want to see the lanterns rise. He wanted to witness them *so badly*. But the lanterns and that dream he’d always looked towards...it was a front for a dream so much bigger than that.

“Ever since I was a kid...this was all I’d ever wanted. And it still is, don’t get me wrong. But after all those years locked in that tower, it always seemed like a pipe dream. I never thought I’d *actually* get here. Never thought I’d know what it felt like to see those lights rise in the sky...” Tommy turned to Wilbur and his voice wobbled ever so slightly as he asked, “*What if it’s not everything I dreamed it would be?*”

Wilbur stared back at him and Tommy could see that he was genuinely thinking over his response as his brows furrowed for a brief moment. Time ticked by and he could feel each second agonizingly slug by with each beat of his frantic heart. Finally, he answered, “It will be.”

Tommy dropped his head and stared down at his shoes. *Is it really so simple?* “And what if it *is*? What do I do then?”

Wilbur leaned back a bit and brought a knee up to his chest. He rested his head against it and then looked ahead. His face expressed the faintest ghost of a smile. “Well that’s the good part, I guess. You get to go and find a new dream.”

A new dream.

The idea seemed impossible to him. Something far and forever out of his reach, just like the lanterns had been all his life. And yet...looking at Wilbur and Techno...he had a good feeling he knew what it might be.

What it could be. What it probably already was.

His new dream would not be far from his grasp. It wasn’t the distance that was the problem.

Tommy swallowed. “Sounds pretty daunting, don’t you think?”

“Most dreams are. But you’ve made it this far, Tommy,” Wilbur pointed out. “In any case, you shouldn’t worry about that now. There’s no rush. Let’s see this dream through first, okay?”

Tommy nodded. His breath stuck in his throat endlessly. Yet he still mustered in enough air to respond, “Okay.”

“Your Majesty,” A voice called, but it never registered in Phil’s mind as he stared down endlessly at the stuffed bear little Theseus had been carrying with him the night he’d been taken. The color of it had slightly faded after years of stasis and the woolen texture was no longer as soft as it had once been.

Still, no child's toy should be so well-preserved. This bear should've been worn to rags by now, but without its owner, it remained perfectly intact save for a few signs of wear.

He vaguely heard someone call his name again.

He remembered his son's face the day he'd given him the bear. He remembered how his expression had lit up as bright as the sun. Theseus had hugged the bear to his chest and then promptly ran into his father's arms. Phil gasped softly at the memory and for a fleeting moment, he thought he could feel his youngest in his arms.

"Phil." Finally, he looked up to see Schlatt staring at him with a remorseful expression, the same one he wore every year. Phil knew Schlatt blamed himself for not being able to catch the masked captors. He had been so close but had been foiled by an arrow to the shoulder. Schlatt had been the last person to see Theseus alive, so of course, he blamed himself.

It seemed everyone blamed themselves for their own failures. Wilbur's words echoed in his mind. *"Maybe we could've done everything right. And maybe we still would've lost him."*

There was a heavy truth to be found there.

Phil looked up and swallowed. "Schlatt."

"You don't have to do this, you know."

Phil chuckled tearfully. "You say that every year."

"And every year, I fucking mean it," Schlatt stated firmly. After a moment his posture slackened and he placed a hand on the Emperor's shoulder. "You can let Puffy or I do it. You know we would in a heartbeat."

“I know. I know you would,” Phil’s voice wobbled. “But my little boy is sixteen years old today. And I have to do this.”

Schlatt shook his head and without any malice, he sighed. “You’re so damn stubborn.”

“I always have been,” Phil replied, his voice empty. For a moment, he thought he could just get up and get it over with. Just push everything down until the first lantern was in the sky. But since when did The Angel of Death ever get what he wanted?

“*Sixteen.*” Suddenly it was too much and Phil buried his face in his hands. He gritted his teeth tightly as he fought hard to swallow back his grief. “He’d be sixteen.”

He inhaled shakily. The reality that his son would’ve been nearing an adult soon tore at him like a knife to the heart.

Or perhaps a sword through the abdomen.

Either way, both left him breathless. Phil felt Schlatt’s grip on his shoulder tighten.

“Please, Phil. Don’t do this to yourself again. Let me do it,” Schlatt begged, his voice uncharacteristically tearful.

Phil lifted his face from his hands and choked back a sob. Maybe he was right.

Maybe he should let Schlatt or Puffy carry the burden this year.

His son was sixteen. He’d be Tubbo’s age now, a bit younger but close. The baby fat from his cheeks would’ve dwindled by now. He’d be taller, maybe nearing or past his own height...His greyish-blue eyes would stay the same, that much he knew. But his golden blonde hair...

Phil sighed. Everyone had always said that Theseus had hair like his own. That he had been his spitting image.

He had always responded with pure facts. Phil's hair wasn't golden. It had never been close to that color. No, he had plain straw-blonde hair. But Theseus had hair that rivaled the sun and eyes that signaled an oncoming summer storm.

He tried to imagine Theseus now grown in his mind and yet the only person he saw was...

Phil inhaled deeply through his nose as he steadied his voice and asked Schlatt, "Walk with me?"

Schlatt stood still for a moment and Phil could see a fight raging behind his own dark eyes. Phil had to do this. He had to raise that first lantern but...he couldn't do it alone.

Not anymore.

Schlatt nodded and his voice seemed to echo, "Always."

Phil swallowed tight as he was suddenly reminded that no matter what happened. If war raged throughout the land. If the sky rained hell down upon them. If the entire world turned against him. He'd always have the man he affectionately called his brother at his side.

Schlatt held out a hand to him and Phil grabbed it, letting him pull him to his feet. Phil set the bear down on the couch he'd been sitting on with a gentle hand. He shifted the crown on his brow back into place and smoothed out his hair. With unsteady breath he stepped forward, already spotting his son's lantern sitting on the pedestal on the balcony and waiting simply for a quick strike of flint and steel to send it flying into the air.

Beneath the lantern, he knew sat a lock of his son's hair. It was a lock he and Kristin had saved the day they had given Theseus his first haircut after he'd arrived. Thankfully with Wilbur's wild curls and Techno's long hair, the two were more than experienced when it came to cutting hair. The scraps they'd saved as a memento to show Theseus when he was older now sat as one of the few pieces left of him.

A hand shot in front of him just before he made his way to the balcony and Phil raised an eyebrow in confusion. Schlatt held up a hand and huffed, "Hold on. Kristin would wring my neck if I didn't

fix this.”

His hands came up to the medallion bearing the family crest upon his chest which had been shifted ever so slightly out of place. It was a minor flaw in his appearance and not one he'd ever imagined his wife to stop him for.

Schlatt shifted it back into place and Phil realized it had been a gesture less for the sake of vanity and more so as a moment's respite before taking the plunge into what Phil considered to be the worst yet most meaningful day of the year.

“Ready?” Schlatt backed away, his eyes growing dull.

“Ready,” Phil echoed.

He pushed open the doors and felt that same crushing weight of grief he did every year when he saw his son's lantern. At least until he felt a small weight land atop his shoulder as soon as he went outside. He turned to see Crow peering back at him.

It seemed Tommy's little bird didn't want to see him alone today either.

Phil gave the bird a weak smile and murmured, “Thank you, little one. We could use the company.”

Crow chirped back softly and grew quiet as Phil slowly stepped forward to the pedestal. He looked over the night sky and down at his people and knew at that moment they were all one with their grief.

He inhaled deeply as he stared at the lantern for a long moment before grabbing the lit candle sitting at the side of the pedestal.

He felt Crow nuzzle her head into his cheek as he placed his hand beneath the lantern.

And just as he hoisted it into the sky he whispered quietly to himself, “Happy Birthday, my little Theseus.”

“Okay see that one?” Techno asked, pointing to an oddly shaped bundle of stars.

“Orion?” Tommy turned his head as the three laid back against the roof.

Techno chuckled. “That’s right. Definitely one of the most recognizable constellations. But do you see that other one?”

“Erm...” Tommy tilted his head, his hair brushing against the tiles as he stared at a confusing blob of stars. “Might need to explain that one big man.”

“That’s Scorpius. Or the scorpion that slayed Orion,” Techno explained. His hands expanded outwards gesturing to the sky. “Orion was an arrogant hunter who swore to Artemis that he would kill every animal on earth.”

“Sounds like a dumbass.” Tommy grinned and raised up his own hand to flip off the constellation.

“Only a fool would say that to the goddess of the hunt.” Techno agreed. “Artemis outwitted him of course and sent a scorpion to kill him for his hubris.”

“Girlboss,” Tommy said.

“Where’s Gemini?” Wilbur asked.

And after a moment of searching Techno pointed to the far right. “There they are.”

“They?” Tommy asked.

“Castor and Pollux. Twins.” Techno smiled. “Their mother was Leda who was seduced by Zeus. Pollux was immortal while Castor was...not.”

“When Castor was killed Pollux begged his father to grant Castor immortality.”

Tommy frowned as he looked on at the constellation. It was then he realized that the constellations were holding hands.

“He didn’t want to live without his twin,” Wilbur added. “Zeus granted his wish and the two were reunited.”

Techno snorted. “You’re a sap, Wil.”

“Sue me,” Wilbur retorted.

Tommy hummed and then his eyes widened and he sat up to point at a group of stars that mimicked a bird taking flight. “Wait, what’s that one?”

Techno sat up as well and furrowed his brow for a moment, deep in thought. Suddenly Wilbur spoke, his voice seemingly sad, “That’s the Phoenix, right? The firebird.”

Recognition shone in Techno’s eyes and he nodded. “Yes. That’s right.”

The Phoenix.

It was funny how that bird kept coming up. Tommy thought.

Tommy wasn’t stupid. He knew what he was. This morning had proved it. It wasn’t till now that he truly let it sink in. He wasn’t just some random bird hybrid.

He was a mythical fucking bird.

Purpled hadn't been lying and Tubbo had been right in his research.

He was a Phoenix.

His powers had never made sense to him till now. Why healing magic? What for? Maybe this had been the real reason he'd been kept locked away.

He thought it had all been a curse for years. Dream had always made it seem like it was his fault he had his magic. He made him feel selfish for being born the way he was for so many years.

Wilbur was right. Dream had made him feel like a burden.

Techno was right. It had never been love at all, had it?

Maybe in some fucked up way it was, but it was nothing but toxic. Dream would destroy him ultimately.

"You were right, Wil," Tommy said, leaning back against his hands.

Wilbur quirked his head, "What about?"

"It is the best view."

Tommy leaned forward to rest his chin on his hands. Almost instantly he felt Wilbur's hand loosely grab the back of his shirt. Tommy smiled. He was making sure he didn't fall.

He looked forward into the distance. He could see the forest they'd come from, even as dark it was now. It stretched on almost endlessly. Looking more towards the city he saw a lake far to the right with boats peppering all throughout its waters. And Tommy knew it was full of people just waiting for Phil. For the Emperor to send his son's memory to the sky. Perhaps it was a beacon for him to see, wherever he might be.

Maybe Tommy had been a little selfish in his youth thinking they were solely for him just because they happened only on his birthday.

He hummed thoughtfully to himself, looking down at his shoes for a brief moment.

He wondered where Crow was right now.

A wisp of golden light suddenly appeared in his peripheral and his eyes went wide. He knew that glow.

Tommy would know it anywhere. His head snapped up and he saw a single lantern drift into the air. It was small but beautiful and for the first time ever he felt grieved now that he knew its meaning. Now that he knew what it meant for the people he cared for.

He hoped Phil wasn't alone.

And then...the entire kingdom began to come alive. Little by little, hundreds *no—thousands* of lanterns suddenly flickered to life. Tommy's breath caught tight in his throat. Without thinking he rose to his feet to get a better look.

He felt Wilbur at his side in an instant grab his shoulder. He hardly noticed.

All he could see was light. It was beautiful and mesmerizing. It was as if the sun itself had breathed life into the lanterns even from where they sat still in the hands of a kingdom that mourned endlessly for Prince Theseus.

And then they flew.

Tears welled up in his eyes. Little by little they slowly rose into the air and Tommy felt his heart stutter in his chest at the swirl of emotion that threatened to tear a sob from him. The lanterns seemed to dance around in the sky, constantly entwining with one another as slowly the darkness of night faded and all he saw was a gentle but breathtaking gold.

He saw ships filled with people. He saw every road in the city light up like a beacon. Even the castle seemed to shine as the residents released their own lanterns.

All that time...All those years he'd spent in that tower, hidden from the world. In that moment he truly saw how *blind* he'd been. They were never simply strange stars. They were never just a strange anomaly that had fascinated him.

They were love.

They were love. They were grief and sorrow. They were joy and celebration. They were *human*.

They were so infuriatingly human. And Tommy had been kept from it his entire life.

A lantern drifted up close to him, nearly hitting the window below him and ending its travel path. Tommy kneeled down and reached out. His hand brushed under the stiff paper and he felt the warmth of the fire as he stood back up and propelled it back into the air with a smile that resembled starlight.

The entire sky was a rosy gold and so *warm*.

His eyes watered as he sucked in a shuttered breath. A smile wobbled to his face as he beamed tearfully. An arm wrapped around his shoulder and Tommy instinctively leaned into Wilbur's side.

He looked up to see the brunette looking at him with a bittersweet expression. His crimson eyes were misty. A single tear fell down his cheek that he knew was for Theseus and Tommy tightened his grip around his waist slightly.

“I see it, Wil,” Tommy said, just loud enough for Wilbur to hear.

“Thank you,” Wilbur whispered back and Tommy furrowed his brow briefly, confused about why Wilbur was thanking him.

Suddenly he felt someone tap against his leg and he looked down to see Techno sitting down again, looking up at the two with three lanterns in his hands, ready to take flight. Tommy pulled Wilbur down with him and crossed his legs as he sat.

He looked at Techno, ready to snatch the lantern out of his hand but then he stopped. At that moment, he saw nothing but trust and perhaps a budding form of something he’d always longed for but never had truly gotten from Dream.

At that moment, the weight in his pocket finally disappeared as he dug his hand into it.

“I have something for you guys too,” Tommy said. He *finally* lifted Theseus’ pendant from his pocket and cupped it protectively in his hands as he showed it to Techno and Wilbur. Techno’s eyes widened and then his eyes too grew misty.

Tommy thought his heart might truly break if he ever saw Technoblade cry. He could handle Wilbur, even Phil. But Techno was the most guarded of them all. He kept his feelings hidden, only for those he loved to see.

The world seemed to shift in his eyes as he saw Techno look at Tommy, emotions bare and all. It seemed Tommy fell under that category.

“I should’ve given it to you before...but I was just *scared*,” Tommy said. He held out the necklace for either Techno or Wilbur to easily take, but neither made a move. “But the thing is...”

Tommy was home. He’d never need to be scared again. He had found what he was looking for.

“I’m not scared anymore. You know what I mean?”

Techno smiled and he set down the lanterns, weighing them down with his satchel. Techno looked up at Wilbur and words seem to pass between them that Tommy would never know. And in a gesture Tommy would've never expected from the man then he closed his hands around Tommy's, hiding the necklace from sight.

His voice was soft. "I'm starting to."

Techno pushed his enclasped hands back against Tommy's chest. "Why don't you hold onto it a little longer? That way you know we will hold up our end of the deal."

Tommy shook his head. "But I...I don't--"

Techno leaned forward to bump his forehead affectionately against Tommy's. He felt the hands holding his own squeeze gently. "This is my trust in you, Tommy. I trust you'll keep my little brother's necklace safe till the deal ends, okay?"

Tommy pulled back and looked back at Wilbur. The man simply nodded. "Don't look at me. I've already lost it once. I know it's in safe hands."

I don't want the deal to end though.

Tommy swallowed. He was truly in danger of crying now. He cupped the necklace tightly against his heart and nodded. He tucked the necklace safely back into his pocket and Techno handed him and Wilbur their lanterns. Tommy hugged his loosely against his chest, relishing in its warmth.

"Ready?" Wilbur asked. Tommy looked to Techno who nodded. His shoulders relaxed and the three gently released their lanterns in the sky.

Tommy leaned back again and giggled when he saw them cluster together, dancing around one another.

The three looked on at the lantern show and Tommy felt a wave of peace crash over him. Suddenly Tommy felt something bump against his back and Tommy looked over to see Wilbur holding his guitar in his hands. It seemed he had grabbed it while Tommy had been distracted.

Tommy's hands itched to hold the guitar. He'd never seen one before and the musical side of him burned. "Can I?" Tommy asked, holding out his hands.

Wilbur looked apprehensive for a moment but he nodded and gently handed it to him. Tommy held it awkwardly in his arms, unsure for a moment how he was supposed to hold it. Wilbur chuckled softly and gently guided Tommy's right hand to the strings over the sound hole. He reached around and grabbed his left, leading it to wrap around the neck of the guitar. Tommy's soft and uncalledoused fingers gently brushed the strings and he gasped at the sound it made.

It was nothing like a piano in the slightest. It wasn't sharp and clear like the piano but rather it was warm and cozy-sounding. Like a warm fire on a cold night. He strummed it again, messing around with the notes for a moment till he played something that vaguely resembled a funny-sounding song.

Tommy grinned mischievously. "*Wilbur Watson is a musician. He sings about women, which I find cool. Wait, that's wrong. He sings about Quackity, which I find—*"

Wilbur shoved his face in Techno's side. Tommy felt Techno's hand wrap around his front protectively and Tommy closed his eyes for a brief second before sitting up. Tommy busted into laughter. "W-Wait hold on, you're interrupting my genius. I was just about to get to the part about me being massive, or maybe that would've been better to start with. I had a whole song planned and everything."



Wilbur rolled his eyes but still found himself laughing as he took the guitar from Tommy, “I think I’ll pass for right now, gremlin.”

“Your loss,” Tommy sang as his eyes were still glued to the lanterns that were beginning to fade into the sky.

“Actually,” Wilbur began, and Tommy immediately noticed the sudden shift in his voice. He looked over to see Wilbur staring at the ground below him. His gaze shifted to Tommy. “Do you mind If I sing something? I do it every year and it’s important to me.”

There was no underlying humor in Wilbur’s words. He was being completely serious and Tommy nodded. “Yeah of course. I’ve been excited to hear you play actually.”

Wilbur gave a small smile and then looked at his twin. “Techno?” He asked.

Techno loosened his grasp on Tommy but he gave him a strange look before turning to his brother. “Yeah. I’m ready.”

“Alright,” Wilbur inhaled deeply through his nose. Tommy crossed his legs up under him and slightly turned himself to Wilbur, a bit eagerly.

Wilbur peeked open an eye and gently smiled. “I hope you like it, Tommy.”

With that, he began to sing. And Tommy had to admit. Wilbur’s voice was miles better than his own.

“The evil it spread like a fever ahead

It was night when you died, my firefly”

Tommy’s eyes snapped up. It was at that moment it felt like something in Tommy’s mind had broken through a wall.

“What could I have said to raise you from the dead?

Oh, could I be the sky on the Fourth of July?”

Wilbur’s voice seemed to vibrate throughout his skull, but it wasn’t painful. If he was being honest, it felt like something deeply buried within him had suddenly pulled itself out of the darkness. An itch of familiarity burned in his gut.

“Well you do enough talk

My little hawk, why do you cry?”

Tommy looked up at Wilbur and his melody. His eyes were shut tight with emotion framing his face in the dimming golden light. His fingers thrummed across the strings with ease from obvious years of practice.

Deja vu seemed to roar inside him. Why did he recognize this? Had he read the lyrics somewhere before? He was unfamiliar with the guitar melody but the lyrics felt engraved to his soul. He remembered them like he remembered his own name.

“Tell me what did you learn from the Tillamook burn?”

Tommy remembered this. He knew this song. He had no idea why but he knew this song. And he knew Wilbur’s voice with it.

Tommy could hear his heart pounding in his ears.

“Or the Fourth of July?”

The next line was not said voluntarily, at least it didn’t feel voluntary. Something old and hazy grabbed at Tommy’s throat and as he sang the last lyric it felt like a forgotten soul crying out one last time.

“We’re all gonna die.”

Tommy smiled. It didn't feel wrong to finish Wilbur's song for him. On the contrary, nothing had ever felt more right in his life.

At least that was until he felt Wilbur stiffen like a stone. He jerked away from Tommy as if he'd touched a hot stove and Tommy turned, confused.

His breath hitched in his throat at the horror he saw in Wilbur's eyes. *Oh no.*

"Sorry...I couldn't help it. I don't know why but I knew the lyrics." Tommy explained. Techno gripped a hand around his arm.

Tommy looked back a bit but Techno wasn't looking at him. He was looking at Wilbur who was staring at him with such pain in his eyes Tommy immediately tried to reach out for him. Techno pulled him back but spoke to his twin, "*Wilbur.*"

Wilbur shook his head furiously, his breath came out panicked. After a moment though, he slapped a hand over his mouth and let out a whimper. He then rolled onto his knees to stare at Tommy with the most destroyed expression he'd ever seen.

Wilbur's hands were hesitant as they came up to brush against Tommy's cheeks.

He gently held Tommy's face in his hands and Tommy couldn't help but grab Wilbur's forearms in response. And in the teen's last moment of peace, Tommy spotted a lantern just out of his reach.

And then Tommy's entire world was set ablaze by what Wilbur said next. Everything seemed to crumble to the ground at that moment.

Wilbur spoke. And Tommy immediately wished he hadn't at all as Wilbur gasped brokenly.

"Theseus?"

Chapter End Notes

i regret nothing

suffer

also no that was not sally at the beginning that was an arbi and emi cameo lmao

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you liked the art for this chapter consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on twitter, tumblr, tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

I'll see you guys in the next chapter<3<3<3

Tommy

Chapter Notes

Welp. Here we go.

A note of warning, please pay attention to the TWs this chapter unless you don't want semi-spoilers. In that case read at your own risk besties.

TW: Blood and Gore, Character Injury, Character Death, Non-Consensual Drug Use (Drugging), Physical and Emotional Abuse.

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart <3

Word Count: 11.2k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Theseus?” Wilbur’s voice broke.

Everything in Tommy seemed to screech to a halt. Did he just call him...?

He pulled back slowly from Wilbur’s grasp, his eyes wide at the realization that yes, *Wilbur had just called him by the name of his dead little brother.*

Wilbur’s hands still hung in the air, as if he hadn’t processed that Tommy had backed away apprehensively.

“Wilbur,” Techno’s voice cut through him like a knife and Tommy winced when a hand landed on his shoulder and held on a bit too tightly.

“What...?” Tommy was barely audible over the wind. “Why would you say that?”

Wilbur’s face crumpled at his words and Techno reached out for him. “You’re scaring him, Wil. He doesn’t—“

“I’m scaring—?” The brunette’s eyes shot up to meet his brother’s and suddenly confusion and grief turned into red-hot anger. His eyes widened as something clicked in his mind and he hissed out venomously, “You *knew*.”

Technoblade didn’t respond, instead, he swallowed almost nervously and nudged Tommy over to the window they had come from. “Kid, go inside.”

“*Oh, my gods, you bastard. You fucking knew,*” Wilbur cried out in disbelief and tried to grab his brother by the front of his shirt only for Techno to reflexively grab his wrist. He struggled for a moment against the grip before eventually giving up and growling, “How long?”

“Tommy, *inside,*” Techno ordered.

“*How long?!*” Wilbur yelled. Tommy flinched at the volume but still made no attempt to move. He wasn’t leaving. These idiots were arguing on a goddamn rooftop and over him. He wasn’t leaving.

“Since last night,” Techno snapped sharply, and then his expression softened. “Wilbur, *please.*”

Wilbur shook his head in disbelief. He sounded fragile as he asked, “Why didn’t you say anything?”

Techno finally let Wilbur tug himself from his grasp. His next words came out small and broken. “He doesn’t know who we are anymore. *What was I supposed to say?*”

“Fucking anything!” Wilbur turned to look at Tommy and stifled a sob. “*Anything.*”

“Wil...?” Tommy asked and then gently tried to grab Wilbur’s arm. His fingers grasped the leather shakily. Wilbur stared down at his hand as if it burned him, but after a moment he set his free hand atop Tommy’s and squeezed it gently. And then Wilbur pulled away and left, leaving Tommy feeling more alone than everyday he’d been in that fucking tower.

Tommy turned to Techno who was choosing to stare at the ground rather than him. Tommy's voice broke as he asked, "What did I do?"

Techno's eyes stayed trained on the ground but he came forward to gently grab the boy's shoulders and say, "You didn't do anything wrong. Tommy, I swear. None of this is your fault."

Tommy shook his head. "Then why won't you look at me?"

Techno instantly met his gaze and Tommy saw nothing but pain in his eyes. Techno inhaled shakily and then suddenly pulled Tommy into a hug. Tommy would be lying if he said he didn't cling to him for dear life. Techno rested his chin atop his head and assured him, "Everything is gonna be fine. Go back to your room and stay there, *please*. I need to go find Wilbur before he does something stupid."

Tommy buried his face into his chest and asked much like a small child, "Will you come back?"

He didn't care if he sounded like a baby asking it. He was fucking *scared*. Scared that he was about to lose Wilbur and Techno for good. He knew they'd never cast him out but that didn't mean things would ever be the same between them.

Techno nodded into his hair. "I will. I promise."

I need to tell him. Just in case.

"I don't want to go back to him. You were right. *You were right about everything*. Please don't make me go back." Tommy couldn't stop the tears that leaked into his voice and stained dark into Techno's vest. "*I don't want to be alone anymore.*"

Techno's grip on him tightened and he was silent for a long moment before he replied, his voice strained tight, "You never have to go back. You will never have to see him again. You're home, Tommy. This is your home," Techno breathed, and then after a long moment, he whispered, "*Gods, I missed you...*"

Tommy had never heard Techno's voice break like that before. But he knew he never wanted to hear it again.

How could you miss me? I haven't gone anywhere.

"What does that *mean*?" Tommy asked as genuinely as he could. "You're not making sense."

Techno dropped his head, trying to put all he wanted to say into words. He failed. Instead, he pulled back to look at him and spoke gently, "I know. I know I'm not. I'm sorry. Just go to your room okay? I'll be there later and we can talk."

Tommy nodded reluctantly and let Techno lead him back inside. Before he stepped over the window ledge he turned back briefly and spotted the last few lanterns fading away into the night sky.

"Tommy," Techno called and Tommy stepped inside and shut the window behind him. He looked back at Techno. The older man looked to the ground for a moment, deep in thought. "Don't worry about Wil, okay? He's..." Techno sighed and then snorted. "He's terrible at processing things. When he gets overwhelmed, he bolts. I promise you, everything is going to be *fine*."

Tommy was still for a long moment. Internally he was fighting the urge to demand what the hell they were hiding from him. Eventually, though, he nodded and walked off toward his room.

Tommy trailed his hand gently against the fancy wallpaper that lined the dark hallway. The texture of it felt strange against his palms, which had only ever known stone walls. His bottom lip trembled and his throat was tight with tears. Tommy winced as the taste of copper filled his mouth. He'd been biting down hard against his cheek to keep from crying.

He didn't really know what he was doing out here. Techno had told him to go back to his room and stay there, but he couldn't stand to be alone in there right now. He decided to take his time walking around.

His mind was much too full to be anywhere near his bed right now. The soft mattress would surely swallow him whole along with the memory of Wilbur's eyes crowding with tears *for him*.

And he didn't understand.

What had he done to upset Wilbur that much? Was finishing the song rude of him? Then again no amount of rudeness warrants such an extreme reaction, at least not from Wilbur.

No. It had to have been something else. Perhaps he'd accidentally triggered an unwanted memory or something.

But then why had Wilbur been so furious with Techno?

"You knew." Knew what? Why can't they just tell me? Tommy stopped in his path briefly to press his back to the wall.

He placed his head in his hands and groaned. *"Theseus,"* Tommy whispered into the darkness. "Why did you call me that?"

Tommy reached into his pocket and pulled out the necklace. He let the chain dangle until the emerald was at eye level with him. He tilted his head curiously at the gem.

As far as Tommy knew, Theseus was dead and buried. Then again, he didn't actually know what had happened to the kid. Nobody had ever told him and he was too afraid to ask. The last thing he wanted to do was bring up such undoubtedly painful memories. But the twins had always referred to him as being deceased so he'd never questioned it.

"Wait a minute..." Tommy furrowed his brow as he remembered the little girl he'd seen on the steps of the mural in town. *She called Theseus something...What was it?* "The something-or-other Prince..."

Tommy's eyes widened. *The Lost Pr-*

“Tommy!” A voice called out from down the hall, and his train of thought vanished as he spotted Tubbo charging down the hall while waving him down. He was sweaty, out of breath, and apparently determined to tackle Tommy twice in one day.

Tommy leaned back onto his feet and held out his arms to at least *attempt* to catch the ramling. Thankfully, however, Tubbo slowed down enough that the impact didn’t send the two crashing to the ground. Instead, Tubbo latched his hands around Tommy’s forearms and sputtered, “There you are! Tommy, there is something I *really* need to talk to you about.”

Tommy sighed and dropped his head slightly. “Not now, Tubs. I’m really not in the mood.”

As much as he loved the guy, he really wasn’t up for more theories on his powers right now. Tubbo’s hold tightened and the ram ducked his head to meet Tommy’s eyes. Tommy involuntarily winced at the blue sea that stared back. “Please, Tom. It’s important. Like *really important*.”

Either Tubbo couldn’t tell that Tommy was already visibly upset or he was choosing to ignore it. Tommy gathered it was the former. Regardless Tommy gave in pretty quickly. “Fine...what is it?”

Tubbo released his hold on Tommy and clasped his hands together, his eyes sharp and more serious than Tommy had ever seen. The brunette inhaled as he began, “When you told me about Logstedshire at the tavern, I got a bit curious. Only because the name was unfamiliar and I’m usually pretty well-versed in geography. I also knew that you might want some information on your home so I asked my dad for one of his archives and lo and behold he found it.”

Tommy couldn’t help the curiosity that spiked within him. “Wait...you found something? Holy shit...what did it say?”

And then Tubbo’s expression dropped, and suddenly Tommy realized that it wasn’t that Tubbo was excited to talk to him about whatever he found, he was determined that Tommy *needed to know*, devastating or not.

Tommy wasn’t sure how much more bad news he could take at the moment. He was still reeling from whatever had just happened with the twins.

Tubbo began to pinch nervously at his wrist and Tommy swallowed apprehensively as he braced himself. “Well..that’s...what I found might be distressing for you to hear. In fact, I’m worried about how you might handle what I’m about to tell you.”

“Did you find records of the attack?” Tommy asked and then swallowed again. “I can handle that. Tell me.”

Tubbo grabbed Tommy’s hand and held it tight in his own as he asked, “Tommy how old are you? Tell me the truth.”

Well, he hadn’t expected that...

Tommy shook his head as if the question was stupid. “I’m eighteen. You know that.”

“Bullshit. I’m not blind. Well, only partially...” Tubbo shook his head. “I’m serious, Tommy. This is important. Whatever age you tell me will stay between you and me. I swear.”

Tommy groaned. He supposed he couldn’t hide it forever, not that anyone believed he was eighteen anyway. Besides, if he was to stay then there was no reason to keep his true age a secret. “*Fine*. I’m sixteen.”

Tubbo released an awed breath that Tommy hadn’t realized he’d been holding. “Toms...there were records from the attack. It did show me that Angelhunters pillaged the village and killed anyone with wings, just as you said, but there is something else.”

Tommy felt anxiety creep up his spine as he gritted out, “Just say it.”

“How old were you when the village was destroyed?” Tubbo asked.

Tommy blinked, confused but still replied, “Nearly five, why?”

“How about your brother and sister?”

Tommy wracked his brain for a moment before answering, “Um...Dream was fourteen and Drista was nine. *Why?* ”

“Tommy, those dates don’t match up...I combed through multiple sources and each and every one of them said the same thing. The attack on Logstedshire took place twenty-five years ago, not eleven,” Tubbo said slowly, making sure one hundred percent that Tommy heard every word.

Tommy was silent. Unsure of how to process exactly what Tubbo was trying to tell him.

“There’s more. Dad found a death toll with a list of casualties for me to look over and I found your family. Your parents were both listed as well as your sister and Dream. You...you weren’t on the list,” Tubbo explained softly. “I thought at first maybe there had simply been a mistake on both the toll and the time frame, perhaps there was a miscommunication so I looked for birth records in the archive as well as eyewitness accounts of the event that Dad had pulled as well.”

“What...What are you trying to say?” Tommy whispered, his tone warning.

Tommy could feel his heart in his throat as Tubbo continued to shatter his entire world. “I found the birth record for your sister, though I failed to find Dream’s and...yours. As for the eyewitness accounts, all of them say the same thing. That the destruction of Logstedshire and the death of your family occurred ten years before you were born.”

“That’s...That’s impossible. That would make Dream forty years old. Tubbo, he’s twenty-five.” He shook his head, refusing to accept what he was hearing.

“I have a theory for why that might be and it has to do with your powers,” Tubbo said. “I believe that your magic can make people younger with repetitive use. Your magic heals all wounds and rejuvenates skin and all aspects of the body. This doesn’t mean if you healed Phil or my dad that they’d suddenly become twenty years old again, but it could halt their age or even reverse it for a short period of time. Eventually, though, the magic wears off and the clock starts again.”

Wouldn’t I have noticed that?! If Dream hadn’t been aging all this time, Tommy would’ve noticed. He knew he had trouble remembering shit during that time in his life but his brother appearing twenty-five at age fourteen would be hard to miss.

Tommy tried to ignore the chill that went down his spine when he realized he couldn't picture what Dream or George looked like when they were kids. All he saw was...

Tubbo pulled Tommy's hands against his chest as Tommy struggled to inhale. "I know this sounds insane and if you want to look over my research then of course I'll let you but there is one more thing and this might be the hardest to accept."

"What more could you tell me?" Tommy gasped. "You're already telling me my family isn't my family and that I didn't watch my big sister die in my brother's arms. *Which I remember.* Unless I stopped aging as well, which I think I would've noticed, this doesn't make *any fucking sense.*"

"I know. I know. This sounds insane, but I swear to you, Tommy. I swear on my life...on my father's life that I would never make up something like this." Tubbo squeezed Tommy's hands within his own. "Tommy, there isn't an easy way to say this so I'm just going to say it. *I think...I think you're Theseus, Tommy.*"

Tommy jerked out of Tubbo's grasp and glared at him. *Not him too. He can't seriously be suggesting this? There is no way.* "What the fuck, dude?"

What is happening?

"Tommy, listen, *please.* I know. *I know* it sounds insane but I need you to hear me out on this." Tubbo's eyes filled with tears that threatened to spill at any moment.

"Tubbo if this is some desperate attempt to try and get me to stay then that's *really fucked.*" Tommy shook his head, backing away slightly.

"It's not! I promise you, Tommy. I'm being serious. I know how it sounds. I know it sounds like I'm reaching for some desperate hope that my best friend is still alive but I *need* you to understand. I've been suspicious of you *from the moment I met you.*" Tubbo threw up his hands. "I mean, *fucking hell.* Can you truly tell me hasn't there been a moment or two where one of us said or did something that was familiar?"

A dark voice hissed inside his mind. *He's lying. He's lying. He's lying.*

Tommy's voice finally broke, "*Please, Tubbo.* I'm not going back to Dream. I'm staying here. I even told Techno. *Please don't do this. Just stop.*"

Tubbo's tears finally fell and he shook his head. "You've seen Theseus. You know what he looks like, you can't honestly say he doesn't look like you."

Tommy finally snapped at him, "He's *dead!* He's fucking dead, Tubbo! They told me he was dead! Stop fucking with me."

Now Tubbo's expression darkened and he hissed defensively, "He's not dead! He was kidnapped! They came in the night and they took him. There was never any ransom and there was never a body. We never found a trace of Theseus."

Tubbo wiped his eyes with his sleeve. "*He's not dead.* He's just lost. And he's forgotten me. He's forgotten the promise we made never to leave one another. He's forgotten he's Theseus."

"Stop," Tommy begged. "Do you know how many blonde-haired blue-eyed sixteen-year-olds there are? I'm not the Lost Prince and I *know* who my family is, no matter how much they hurt me."

Tubbo reached into his pocket and shoved something metal against his chest. "I know this is a lot, so all I'm going to ask is that you go to Theseus's room and spend some time looking around. If it's not familiar and you think I'm lying then I won't bring it up ever again. But *please*, Tommy. If there is even the slightest chance that my best friend is still alive...I have to take it."

Tommy let Tubbo drop the item into his hand and his eyes widened at the brass key that sat in his palm. "Tubbo, *this is Phil's.* I can't ju—"

"Look, if I'm wrong. I'll take the fall." Tubbo smiled weakly. "Just take five minutes to look around and see if anything sparks, *please.*"

This is fucking insane. But if it makes him drop it...then I'll do it. Considering all that had happened tonight...what could it hurt? It had all gone so wrong so fast. Tonight had been perfect until *that song*. He'd been so happy. Happier than he'd ever been in his life. So why had four words ruined it all?

He had to at least grant Tubbo this. Maybe it would give him some peace of mind when nothing happened in that room. Maybe Tubbo was wrong. Some part of him prayed he was.

He's wrong, you know. Dream's voice burned in his head. *You're not special. This isn't a fucking fairytale. Like it or not. They will never be what you want them to be. They'll never be what I am to you.*

"Tubbo, if you're wrong..." *Which you are.* "This will *destroy* you. It will *hurt*. Is that really what you want?"

"I'd rather know for sure than live in the unknown," Tubbo said quietly, his voice pained. "I can handle being wrong, Tommy. And if I am, then nothing changes. You're my friend no matter the outcome, and I couldn't be happier about it. I just...I need to know."

Tommy bit his lip in contemplation. All around this was a terrible, *terrible* idea. Wasn't he in enough trouble already? Getting caught in Theseus' room...even if Tubbo took the fall...

Then again, Phil had told him no one except a maid every now and again went in there...so the odds of being caught were slim to none. And perhaps it might help Tubbo finally let Theseus rest. Maybe it might ultimately help all of them rest.

Tommy sighed. "Five minutes. Then I'm out, okay?"

Tubbo's eyes sparkled and he smiled, hopeful. "That's all I'm asking. Thank you, Tommy. You don't know how much this means to me."

Tommy tried not to imagine the grief Tubbo would feel when he turned out to be wrong. Instead, he asked, "Do you want to come with me?"

“No, no. I think my being there could distract you. Besides, I need to get home before my Dad grounds me for missing my curfew. You can tell me in the morning, alright? Sleeping on it could help too,” Tubbo said.

Tommy frowned and then pulled the brunette into his arms. He spoke softly into his shoulder, “Even if I’m not Theseus, you’re still my friend. And tomorrow we can go over those notes about Logstedshire, okay? Because even if you’re wrong about me being *him*, this isn’t the first time my brother has lied to me. But I still have memories of watching my sister die and now I don’t know what to believe.”

“We’ll figure it out, Tommy. I promise,” Tubbo said and wrapped his arms around his waist.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, okay?” Tommy hugged him tighter for a moment before pulling away, a forced smile on his face.

“Goodnight, Tommy.” Tubbo nodded.

“Night.”

As Tommy turned to leave, Tubbo suddenly called out with a question that sent chills up his spine. “Tommy, is today your birthday?”

Tommy looked over his shoulder to meet his eyes. He opened his mouth to deny it but nothing came out. So instead he hastily ran off.

“Five minutes.” Tommy breathed. “Just five minutes. I go in. I look around the probably creepy-ass abandoned nursery, then I go to my room to wait for Techno to tell me everything is fine and Wilbur doesn’t hate my guts.” *Easy, right?*

Unsurprisingly, it became apparent rather quickly that gaslighting himself was not an effective way to cope with tonight’s events. But he sure as shit was gonna try.

Tommy's hands trembled as he slotted the key into the rusted lock. *This is such a breach of privacy oh my gods.*

"This is a bad idea. This is *such* a bad idea. *Goddamn, you, Tubbo.*" Tommy gritted his teeth as he turned the key and winced at the sharp click.

The door creaked heavily from an apparent lack of use and Tommy swore under his breath. Phil was literally down the hall in the office, and who the hell knew where Techno and Wilbur had gone?

He groaned silently in frustration. He was gonna wake up the entire fucking castle at this point. Tommy needed to hurry his ass up if he didn't want to get caught. Surely a guard or something had heard that. So Tommy sucked in a breath, he swung open the door another half foot, and slid himself inside as quickly as possible. His eyes were shut tight as he closed the door behind him and turned the lock back into place.

Tommy waited a long moment in the dark for the sound of commotion outside the door and breathed out in relief when a minute passed in silence. He let his forehead brush against the old wood of the door and gently peeled open his eyes to look down at the wooden floor below him.

The first thing he noticed was that the room smelled nothing like the rest of the castle. There was no faint smell of a dying fire that had raged in the hearth the night before. There was no trace of the people he cared for in the air. Only instead of the harsh smell of cleaning chemicals and...the crisp April air?

Tommy turned when he noticed that the room he stood in was fucking *cold* . As for the rest of the room? He expected nothing when he turned. Perhaps a few beds that were now much too small for their owners to fit in anymore and some other miscellaneous furniture.

What he saw was close, but Tommy would call it a tomb rather than a nursery. Three beds sat in the room. Two were on the far side of the nursery while the smaller one sat pressed against the wall near the balcony. Tommy raised an eyebrow. The door to the balcony was strangely open, quickly solving the mystery of the draft.

He moved to close the doors and frowned when he found the latch was broken. *Odd.* Tommy didn't think much more of it, however. His wings twitched behind him irritably, suddenly tired of being contained within his cloak. Tommy unhooked his brooch and let the dark blue fabric fall to his feet. His wings flexed out behind him and Tommy exhaled at the relief the stretch brought him.

Suddenly, Tommy noticed the room was suddenly much more illuminated than a moment ago. He turned and smiled a bit when he saw his wings giving off a faint orange glow that highlighted the planes of his face and his surroundings. He gently ran his hand through his feathers. Perhaps there were perks to this new development.

Turning back to the nursery, he ran a hand lightly across the bedframe of what he guessed was one of the twin's beds. He noticed the beds were neatly made up, most likely by a maid. He turned to Theseus' bed and saw the same. His head then quirked to the side as he noticed something small and silver sitting atop the center of the bed, as well as a stuffed animal that he couldn't quite make out from this side of the room.

He walked over to Theseus' bed and looked down with a conflicted expression. Tubbo's voice echoed inside his head.

"I think you're Theseus."

You're wrong, Tubbo. I'm so sorry.

He couldn't be Theseus. He had memories of his sister. He'd seen her face in that dream he'd had the other night, right? Yes, it had been the only time he could remember seeing her, but it had to count for something right?

I mean like, what were the fucking odds? Wilbur and Techno just *happened* to stumble across their long-lost brother? Tommy wasn't sure he believed in fate but he knew damn well things never work out *that easily*.

He wasn't Theseus.

He couldn't be. He didn't want to be. Tommy longed to be wanted so badly. He wanted to be loved unconditionally by people who actually cared about him and would never hurt him the way Dream

had. But he wanted to be loved because he was Tommy. Not because he was the lost Prince of the Antarctic Empire who could never live up to what they wanted him to be.

They wanted their brother back. Not the empty shell of someone who once was.

Maybe that's the real reason Wilbur had said Theseus was dead. Because even if Theseus did return to them one day, he'd never be the boy that they'd lost. It had been too long.

Tommy knelt down and gently lifted up what he now saw to be a tiny crown sitting on the center of the bed. It was made of intricately detailed silver vines that glinted in the moonlight as he turned it in his hands.

He couldn't help but wonder if it sat on the bed to act as a makeshift grave for a boy whose body was never found.

Tommy set the crown back down and fished out Thesues' necklace from his pocket. He was about to set it down to rest with the crown and the boy to whom it truly belonged, when suddenly his breath hitched at an odd sense of déjà vu washing over him. He'd held this necklace in his palm dozens of times by now, but this was the first time it had felt familiar. No, perhaps not the first. He'd always felt some strange connection to it. He had ever since Crow had dropped it into his hands in the tower and he'd put it on that first time...

The fingers of his free hand brushed against the worn comforter of the bed thoughtfully for a moment. Tommy turned the emerald in his palm and stared at it for a long time. He lifted his empty hand and placed it against his chest. It felt like lightning shooting through him when he realized why just holding it bothered him so much.

It reminded him of a familiar weight that once had always hung from his neck until one night...

"How did you lose it? You never take it off!" A young voice yells irritably.

Tommy yelped and leapt back a few steps, clutching the necklace tight to his chest. *No. No, stop it.*

“I don’t know!” A toddler cries out, nearly on the verge of tears. “Don’t yell at me!”

He felt it again. The same feeling he’d felt on the balcony with the twins. That voice. The one buried deep in the back of his mind and left for dead. Tommy sucked in a breath as finally something clicked and someone who had been locked away as long as Tommy had at long last regained their voice.

The one...The one Dream and George had done their best to smother.

The one that questioned them.

The one that told them strange stories of a boy with sea-blue eyes and brown hair. Who had sung the lullabies he could remember a woman covered in purple roses singing for him. Who had fought against the poison the two had been feeding him for as long as he could until it finally silenced him.

Tommy held up the emerald necklace and then looked toward Wilbur’s bed. He muttered under his breath but the voice that came out didn’t feel like his own, “He didn’t want to go to the ball...It was stupid and for grown-ups...”

He could hear his heartbeat in his ears as he sluggishly stumbled towards the bed like a sleepwalker. “Theseus lost his necklace...He...”

Tommy inhaled shakily. “I...didn’t lose it. I hid it under Wilbur’s pillow...so I wouldn’t have to go...”

He looked back at his bed and finally made out the stuffed cow sitting on his bed. “... *Henry*.”

Sam gave that to him when he was a baby. But where...

Where is the bear? No...where is my bear?

He'd had it with him that...His father had given it to him. Theseus was shit at naming things so Techno named him 'Steve'.

Theseus had it with him that night..no...I...I'd had it with me that night. That night...when Phil had...

He'd had a bad dream that night. He'd dreamed of the man with the smile and it had frightened him so bad that he'd run off to find his father. His father told him all would be well, though he'd said it with tears streaming down his face and the look of horror in his eyes. He'd said he'd never let anyone take him away.

But his father had been wrong. The man came for him.

A white mask and the screams of his...his *brothers* echoed in his mind as well as his own screams. Tommy's knees buckled.

The emerald was clutched tightly in his fist and light engulfed the room. Fire filled his lungs and tore through his chest. His heart pounded and he could feel his wings spark as if every beat of his broken heart was like a steel striking flint. His magic surged and Tommy *wailed* as the memory of Dream plunging a sword through Phil's— *his father's* stomach returned to him.

The memory of his mother's smile as she fixed his crown upon his brow. The gentle kiss she'd pressed to his forehead when he'd fallen asleep that night.

Tubbo's hand within his own as they ran down the halls of the castle, hidden beneath cloaks. His own hand reaching out and grasping the rough canvas of the mattress when he'd realized Tubbo had left his bed that night.

Schlatt's warm grin and a calloused hand ruffling through his hair. George shooting an arrow through him as he tried desperately to reach him.

Ranboo's timid laughter and the warmth of Niki's blueberry muffins.

Launching himself into Quackity's arms in an attempt to surprise him.

Flames as bright and hot as the sun engulfed him and his wings spread wide. Golden light flooded the room and Tommy shakily stood to his feet. He hooked his necklace around his neck, letting the emerald rest where it truly belonged.

His mother had rightfully scolded him for running off and he'd cried himself to sleep in his brothers' arms. Wilbur rocked him in his arms while Techno gently brushed the tears from his cheeks and soothed, *"They won't stay mad forever. They were just scared. We all were."*

And then there was the song Wilbur had sung tonight. It had been the same one Wilbur had lulled Theseus to sleep with that night. Wilbur's horrified expression tonight hadn't been because Tommy had rudely interrupted his tribute to his little brother. He'd looked at him that way because he'd finally realized his brother had come home.

Tommy clutched at his heart as it clenched mournfully and the truth spilled from his lips, *"I'm the Lost Prince..."*

And then the worst thing that could've possibly occurred at that moment happened. A voice that now sounded akin to a snake now chuckled darkly from behind him,

"And here I was beginning to fear I might not get to tell you Happy Birthday, little brother."

Tommy let out a choked sob as cold fear chilled his bones despite the raging inferno his wings had become.

"...No," he whispered.

Dream was here once again to rip him away from his family. He was here to destroy him. Hatred and anger boiled in his gut and Tommy shoved his fear down after a moment of terrible silence to ask shakily, "Is it true?"

He heard footsteps behind him and turned slightly to see Dream exit out the shadows, donned in the very mask that he'd been poisoned to forget. Dream lowered the mask after a moment and his dark green eyes glinted eerily back at him as he shrugged. "Whatever do you mean?"

Tommy's fiery wings flared behind him as the teen growled, leaving his fear behind completely, "Is it true?! Am I The Lost Prince?"

Dream was quiet for a moment and there was something sad in his eyes for a fraction of a second before it vanished and the man grinned. "It was so easy, you know? Taking you that is. Your father was weak, pitiful really. So easy to take by surprise. Wilbur wasn't much harder to subdue, a few kicks to the ribs and he was done fighting."

Tommy's blood boiled as Dream stalked towards him. The man pointed to his scar, "Technoblade though...he fought *hard*. Cut me pretty good. I'd love to return the favor, you know? Maybe after this, I'll pay him a vis--"

Tommy lunged at him. He smacked him hard with his wing, knocking Dream off balance before using his body weight to take him to the ground. He pinned his arms down with his knees and Tommy grabbed at his hair before punching him as hard as he could in the throat. "You fucking monster! *You liar!*" Tommy screamed at him while trying to claw at whatever he could. He felt his nails scratch hard over his eye and Dream barked out something that was definitely not in English. It sounded like nothing he'd ever heard before.

And then suddenly he felt an arm wrap around his throat as someone from behind caught him in a headlock. He was yanked off of Dream who immediately pressed a hand to his bleeding face. Tommy had dug his nails deep into his cheek and had left quite a vicious wound to his right eye. Tommy kicked and flailed against the person until he felt the sharp sting of a needle press into his shoulder and cold liquid seep into his veins.

"No!" Tommy screeched and then the hands released him. Tommy ripped the needle from his arm and chucked it away from him. He then spun to see George backing away quickly, his skin seeming to shimmer with what looked like a fire protection potion. *How did he know to bring...*

His head felt woozy as he stumbled away from the two as far as he could. George pulled Dream to his feet and then said, "It's nothing personal, Tommy."

Meanwhile, Dream laughed though his voice sounded hoarse. “I’m surprised you had it in you. You’ve got a mean right hook. Suppose I taught you a bit *too well*.”

Tommy’s vision spun as he tried to run for the door. His hand hooked around the handle and he pulled but to no avail. George cleared his throat. “There’s no point in running, Tommy. I put a barrier spell on this room. The door is locked and no one can hear anything outside the room.”

I’m trapped. Tommy tugged again as the panic began to seep back in. He turned back towards the two. “Did you even give a shit about me?! Or was this all just a facade to mooch off my fucking powers, eh?”

Dream frowned and took a step towards Tommy who cowered back at the movement. Dream turned away. “Perhaps it’d be easier if I said no, but that’d be a lie.”

Another part of Tommy’s heart cracked and he coughed out a sob. His heart hurt so bad and he wasn’t sure his magic could heal something like this.

“So you took me from my family? You tried to kill Phil and because of you, my mum is *gone*. *My childhood is gone*. I can barely remember who I was. You took everything from me. *And for what?* To keep me as a pet? To lock me up and leave me to rot forever in that tower?” Tommy’s knees gave in as his limbs began to feel akin to lead.

“It was never going to be forever,” Dream admitted as he knelt in front of him. Dream brushed a few strands of hair from his face and Tommy cringed away. Dream dropped his head. “I wanted this to go so much simpler. It could’ve been *so easy*, Tommy. So painless. You would’ve never felt a thing.”

And then he growled and jerked up Tommy’s chin to meet his gaze. “But you just *had* to go fuck with my plans, didn’t you?”

Tommy wadded up a decent amount of saliva in his mouth before spitting it back at Dream and hissing, “What the hell are you talking about?”

Dream wiped the gesture away and the last bit of warmth in his eyes died. “I’ve come to collect what’s mine.”

Tommy laughed spitefully, even though the action made him want to vomit. His body was beginning to grow too heavy to stay upright. Still, he had enough strength to seethe.

“Stay the fuck away from me. I am *never* letting either of you take advantage of me ever again. And I sure as hell am never going back to that tower.”

Dream simply smiled and his eyes flickered over to the now subdued flames from his wings. “You’re not what I’m here for, Tommy.”

Tommy stared at him for a long moment. The words didn’t make sense at first due to the growing fog in his brain, but finally, it hit. Cold realization chilled down his spine as something finally dawned upon him. “No...no you...”

He tried to back out of Dream’s hold but his limbs flopped uselessly at his side. He’s helpless.

He can’t move. He can’t escape. And Dream is an Angelhunter.

Dream wrinkled his nose and gave him a small smile. “It’s terribly ironic, isn’t it? The one person who told you *over and over* again that people were monsters. Terribly cruel monsters that would stop at nothing to destroy that stubborn little light inside you, was the monster you should’ve feared all along.”

He was going to take his wings. He was going to kill him.

Tommy’s breathing was erratic as he choked out, “No, no, please. *You can’t* . You can’t take my wings, Dream. *You wouldn’t!*”

His vision began to blur and his body finally gave in. Dream caught him in his arms and ran a hand through his hair. “I would. And I will. This was always the plan, Tommy. I must fulfill my Master’s wish. I know you could never understand. I’m sorry it had to be you, but I promise it will be over soon.”

He tried to struggle but it was no use as he was brought over to George, who had fished out a terrifying array of tools meant to maim him. As Dream discarded him to the floor, he heard a panicked voice call out to him.

No. No, no, no. You have to fight. You must stay awake and fight, Tommy. I can't get there in time.

"I can't. I can't move," Tommy cried into the floor. "Help me."

He could hear George and Dream murmur to each other above him. Hands straightened him out and part of his shirt was cut off of him, leaving him in the white tunic.

Suddenly Dream turned to him, "Don't worry, Tommy. The next time you open your eyes, you'll see your mother again. Sadly, my master has decided that the Phoenix cannot be allowed to live. Perhaps that is for the best."

"Go...fuck...yourself," Tommy slurred and then let out a scream when he felt hands begin to grab at his wings.

But before he could feel the first tear, the woman called out again. This time her voice was heavy.

You need not feel what comes next. I will make them pay. Stay strong, my heart.

He felt the first part of his wing break off as if someone was tearing his soul from his body but before the pain could hit, a blanket of numbness washed over him and he fell limp.

His mind never went, however. The pain never reached him, but he could feel every tear and tug etched into his body and knew whatever damage they did would never heal. A warm liquid soaked through his shirt and he felt nauseous. Tommy's eyes trailed upward, his cheek pressed into the cold floor. He looked to the balcony and saw the doors had opened up once more.

The monsters above him turned for a moment but continued to tear at him like butchers. He had been nothing but cattle to them all along. Raised to be slaughtered for whatever fucked up god

wanted his wings so badly.

Tommy cried quietly. He wanted to leave. He wanted Techno. He'd promised Tommy he'd come back after talking to Wilbur. Maybe by now, he'd discovered he was missing. Maybe there was already a search party for him. Maybe Tubbo had woken and was now telling them where he was. Maybe this hell was almost over.

And yet time passed on agonizingly slow and endless. But eventually, Tommy could feel his fingers twitch at his side. The potion had worn off, but the staggering amount of blood that was pooling around him was enough to keep him unable to fight back. Dream and George blurred in his vision, and then he felt it.

The final tug.

Dream held Tommy down as George pulled. Tommy let out a terrible cry, not from the pain but from the sound of bones cracking and feathers breaking off as his wings finally gave in and were torn away from him.

He collapsed onto the ground and Dream released him as if he was suddenly worthless. Like he was nothing more than a toy he'd finally grown bored of. Tommy whimpered when he heard Dream laugh, "Don't be so dramatic, Tommy. You told me once yourself you wished them gone. I've done you a favor."

Whatever numbness the woman had provided him was gone now, but thankfully the shock to his system from having his wings violently torn from his spine seemed to keep him from feeling anything at all.

Tommy didn't react, his eyes instead were trained onto the balcony. He tried to pull himself up to crawl slowly towards the door, towards maybe what was freedom, or perhaps death. Whatever got him away from the two who had truly and utterly broken him. And then he saw something fly through the window. A bird.

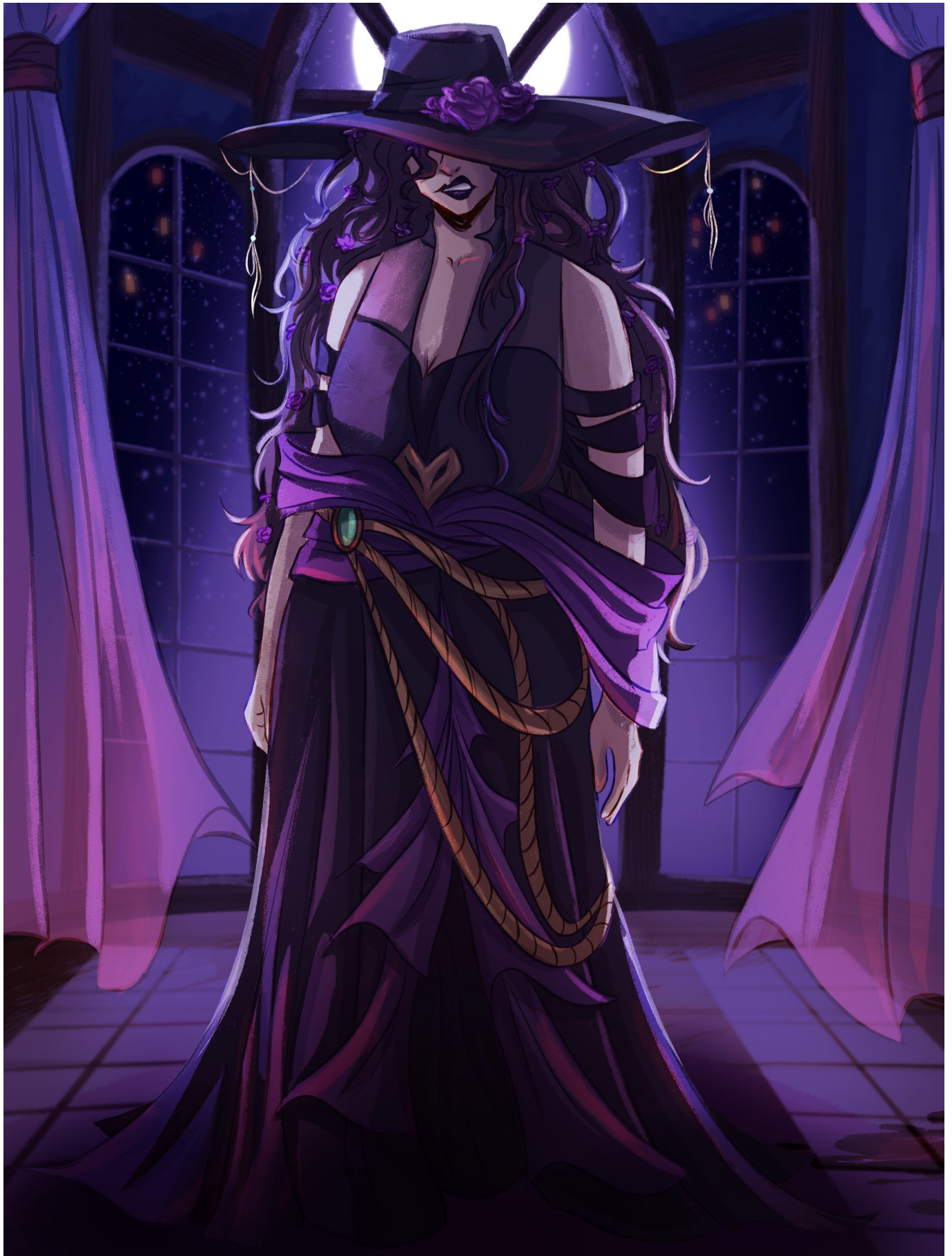
Feathers dark and eyes sharp. Tommy whispered into the floor as he called out to her, "Crow..."

Dream's eyes turned up and George scoffed, "Aw, look at your knight in shining armor."

Tommy ignored him and with trembling hands, reached out to her. He pulled himself up onto his arm and called out again, “Crow...”

Dream kicked him back down and unsheathed his sword. Whether it was to kill him or to kill Crow, he would never know. Because before he could do anything, Crow cawed, deafeningly loud, and something Tommy would later wonder if he’d imagined occurred.

She spread her wings, the midnight black of them growing in size, larger, and larger, until a plume of smoke blocked out the moonlight to take shape. A person emerges from the smoke, tall and radiant.



Her dark feathers were replaced with long, dark brown hair with flowers embroidered into her curls. Black, beady eyes turned vibrant purple as Crow morphed into an ethereal, but furious woman. Her magic swirled around her and her hat was tipped low to hide the unbridled rage upon her face.

Dream stepped back, his once arrogant demeanor frozen in shock and Tommy turned his head slightly to see his face had grown pale as well as George's.

It was George who spoke and Tommy, despite how distorted everything around him was beginning to sound, didn't miss the shakiness of his voice.

"You have no power here, Death. Not since you wasted it on your mortal all those years ago. You cannot interfere to save him. They banished you from this realm."

Death. Tommy thought. Was she here for him? Tommy looked up at her again, noting that the dress she wore sparkled like the night sky. No that's not right...She would never hurt him. His memories were scattered in his mind but he knew this woman. He might be bleeding out but she was so familiar...

Death's lips hooked into a scowl and her voice seemed to shake the room.

"Silence."

She stepped further into the room and her expression only faltered when she looked at Tommy. And it was only then that Tommy realized who she was. He let out a strained cry as tears streamed down his cheeks and he mouthed her name.

Mum.

She knelt down to press her hand to Tommy's cheek for a moment. Her expression was mournful and full of guilt as she spoke to him. "You are so strong, my son. Be strong for me a little while longer."

Tommy nodded his head softly and whined a bit when she pulled away.

Kristin stood and all traces of the sad fondness she'd looked at Tommy with disappeared in an instant, leaving behind only rage. She turned back towards Dream and George and growled out something.

Tommy's vision swam and their voices slurred nonsensically in his ears. Dream seemed suddenly panicked and George's eyes widened. Tommy's mutilated wings fell from George's arms as his mother silently strode over and grabbed George by the neck. She lifted him up effortlessly causing George to immediately begin clawing at her hands, trying to free himself to no avail. Dream tried to lunge at her but she flicked her free hand in his direction and a force Tommy could not see sent him flying into a wall.

His mother's voice was cold and sadistic as she seethed.

"The gods warned you both long ago there were repercussions for going after The Golden Phoenix. I've been sent to carry out the punishment. Which I can assure you, I will take great pleasure in doing so."

Tommy could feel his consciousness slipping too fast for him to catch but he didn't miss what happened next. It was an image that would forever be burned into his mind.

George's mouth hung open in a silent scream as she grinned. And then his skin turned a pale shade of gray and began to crack like dried-out clay. His mother released him, letting his body collapse to the ground. He never made it to the floor, however, as George disintegrated before Tommy's eyes into a pool of dust.

The last thing Tommy heard before another wave of exhaustion washed over him and he passed out was Dream screaming out for George.

Phil sighed irritably as he turned restlessly in his bed, unable to get comfortable. He had hoped given the circumstances that sleep would find him easily tonight but it seemed the odds were not in his favor.

It was strange. He was so tired. The emotional turmoil of the day had worn him to the bone, something Schlatt had been eager to point out. And yet his mind raced despite his weariness. Something was off. There was an anxiety swelling in his chest that refused to abate.

Something was wrong.

Phil threw off his covers and stood up. He turned to grab his robe that he'd discarded earlier onto the floor and threw it back on. He pinched the bridge of his nose as he tried to piece together in his head what felt so strange.

The boys were home. He knew it for a fact, because he'd heard the two screaming at each other earlier. Well, he mostly heard Wilbur yelling, which was not out of character. Phil had taken Puffy's advice and decided to let the two work it out themselves. Techno had a tight grip on his emotions nowadays and he could handle Wilbur's anger better than anyone. Now if Techno began yelling, *then* he would interfere .

It had been a while since he'd heard anything however, so he was certain by now that the two had worked it out.

Phil sincerely hoped that Tommy's day hadn't been affected by whatever drama had occurred in the past hour or so. The kid didn't need to be exposed to that anytime soon. He was far too skittish. However, he was almost certain that his boys would never argue like in front of him.

So maybe it was Tommy?

He hadn't seen much of the boy today but he knew Tommy had made it back home according to the guards. Phil's breath caught at that. Since when had he started referring to here as Tommy's home? And already?

He wasn't even sure if Tommy wanted to stay. He hoped he did. Tommy made things brighter. He'd brought light back into Wilbur's eyes that he hadn't seen in years. He made Techno smile, a truly rare sight. And as for Phil? Tommy made him laugh. He was funny, kind, and sharp as a whip.

And he made Phil dangerously hopeful. Tommy and Theseus were so alike that it was almost uncanny. His eyes alone were enough that Phil had stopped dead in his tracks the first time he'd seen them in the library.

Tommy had the same eyes that Phil saw every time he closed his own. The ones that had haunted his dreams for decades now. The eyes of his child that he'd failed in every possible way.

And yet, Tommy didn't recognize him when Phil for a split second prayed that he would. Nor did Wilbur or Techno give any indication that they thought Tommy could be Theseus. So Phil had let it drop.

And he had let the boy worm his way into his heart effortlessly because it was impossible not to.

Phil settled his hat upon his head and slipped on his shoes. The feeling still hadn't left him yet. It was like a sinking pit in his stomach whispering to him that something terrible was about to happen. He needed to take a walk. Perhaps it would help settle the ever-growing paranoia he felt.

Phil left his quarters, pausing a moment at Wilbur's door to listen. He let out a sigh of relief at the quiet murmur of his sons' voices. The two had made up, it seemed. *Thank the gods.*

Phil looked at Tommy's door for a moment and decided against checking up on him. He was sure the kid was worn out by the day's festivities. Better to let him sleep. He'd see him in the morning after all.

Maybe then the four of them could discuss what came next.

As he passed by the door to the nursery he suddenly shivered when the temperature dropped. Philza hummed in curiosity.

There was a draft blowing in from somewhere. *How strange.*

Tommy's head pounded excruciatingly as he slowly swam back to consciousness.

Everything burned.

With each ragged inhale he took, a new wave of white-hot pain shot through him. There was no more reprieve from the pain to be found now. Every nerve in his body was on fire. It was the worst pain he'd ever felt in his life. All those years spent in the tower with his wings stuffed in his back felt like a scrape on the knee compared to this. He would gladly take that pain a thousand times over. He wanted it to be over. He would give anything for it to be over.

Tommy's eyes blinked open blearily. And as he did the intense ringing in his ear dulled away and he heard a voice.

For one terrible moment, Tommy froze. Had Dream come back to finish him off? Was this merely the first of the many hells he was to go through?

Tommy tried to roll to his side as the room came into focus and he cried out at the ache that movement brought him. It was as if someone had set him on fire and Tommy hated the irony.

It was cruel. Dream had lied to him about so much but he hadn't lied about that. This world was cruel.

He felt a hand press against his face and he screamed in terror. Or at least attempted to. What came out sounded more like a garbled mess. He gagged as he spat out whatever had been choking him.

Blood dribbled down his chin.

"Theseus." Finally, he could make out the voice who was calling him.

He looked up and stars danced across his vision. Or no, perhaps it was the way her dark hair seemed to somehow mimic the night sky. Her eyes shone with tears and she looked at Tommy with a look of pure heartbreak.

“Can you hear me, baby?” She called and suddenly Tommy wasn’t afraid anymore.

He could never be afraid of his mother.

“M-Mum?” Tommy rasped and there was the sound of a choked sob that didn’t come from him. His mother pulled his head into her lap and gently pressed a kiss against his brow.

“Oh, my sweet boy. This wasn’t supposed to happen...” Kristin murmured tearfully as she weaved her fingers through his hair. “I was supposed to protect you.”

“Y-You were...Crow...?” Tommy asked. His heart swelled at the small smile she gave him.

“I never left you, my heart. I’ve always been with you.” Her face fell as she gently used the hem of her dress to wipe away the blood staining his chin. “I’m so sorry this happened, Tommy. I’m sorry I wasn’t here sooner.”

Tommy whimpered as the memory of Dream’s sadistic grin washed over him. He remembered the way George looked at him. As if he was nothing.

And then the way he’d heard Dream scream out for George.

“What happened to Dream? Where...?” Tommy whispered, terrified suddenly that the man could still be lurking somewhere in the shadows. His breath hitched but Kristin was quick to soothe him by thumbing away the tears upon his cheeks.

“He’s gone. He’s gone, I promise. I scared him off. He’s not coming back...for now,” Kristin admitted, a note of fear in her voice.

“You killed George,” Tommy whispered and looked up to see her nod.

“I did,” she said. There was silence for a moment before Kristin looked to the door and then back to Tommy. “Tommy, listen to me. I need you to get up.”

“What?” Tommy’s voice was faint. She was asking him to *stand*? “Mum, I-I can’t...”

“You have to, Theseus.” Kristin pulled away, letting Tommy’s head rest against the cold ground once more. Tommy cried out when he no longer felt her warm touch. Kristin knelt by his side and gently took his face in her hands. “If you want to live. You must get up.”

“Help me,” Tommy asked but his mother shook her head.

“I can’t. I cannot interfere with life and death unless I’m ordered to.” To prove it, she tried to grab Tommy under his shoulders but her hands phased through instantly. “I am banished from interfering. I can comfort you, but I cannot help you. You have to get up.”

It was too much to ask. Tommy couldn’t possibly...he was too weak! But he didn’t want to die. “I’m n-not strong enough...”

His mother shook her head fiercely and brushed a few strands of matted hair from his eyes. “You are. You are so strong, my little bird. You just need to get to the door and open it. Your father is out there.”

Tommy looked to the door and murmured, “Phil...”

Phil was out there. He would save him. His father who had promised to tear the world apart to find him was just outside that door. His brothers. His best friends. His family.

Tommy turned back. “What about you? C-Come with me...They n-need you as much as they... need me.”

Kristin’s voice broke and tears spilled down her cheeks. “Oh, my Theseus, I would be with you always if I could. But I am trapped and you can’t save me. I gave up my freedom so your father could still be with you and I would do it again a thousand times over.”

Tommy mustered up as much strength as he could to sit himself up. He threw his arms around his mother and cried, "I-I'm sorry I ran off. I didn't...mean to scare you."

Kristin lifted her head to let out a tearful laugh and then kissed the top of his head. "I love you, my heart. I love you so much. Tell your brothers and your father that I always have and always will love them with everything that I am."

Tommy nodded into her shoulder and hoped it was enough to convey all that needed to be said.

With that his mother pulled away, leaving Tommy shaking on the ground and trying his best to keep himself upright. She walked to the window and then turned back. "Get up, Theseus. You are strong. You are my son. Show them how strong the son of Death is. Show the world. Show them all. You were meant for greatness. Now rise."

And then she was gone.

Whatever dizziness and weakness Tommy felt at that moment, he pushed aside. He gritted his teeth and used every ounce of strength he had left in him as he began to crawl towards the door. He had to make it. If nothing else, he had to tell them.

Even if it was the last thing Tommy ever did. Tommy needed Wilbur and Techno to know, needed Phil to know that he remembered. However vague and murky his memories were, he remembered them. He remembered their love. He knew who he was.

He was Theseus. He was the son of Death and the youngest Prince of the Antarctic Empire and he was going to fucking let the world know.

"I'm not gonna die here," Theseus slurred as he pulled himself onto his knees and grabbed the door handle. His hands shook as he grabbed the key Tubbo had given him from his pocket. It took him a few tries as his vision tilted nauseously to the side but eventually, he heard it slot into the keyhole and turn.

The click of the lock was the most beautiful sound he'd ever heard. Tommy let out a strained groan as he slowly hauled himself to his feet, using the door handle to pull him up. He leaned his weight in the door frame and opened the door, relishing in the loud ass creak it made as it swung open wide.

He let the key clatter on the ground and took it slow as he slowly shifted one foot in front of another and stepped. His knees buckled immediately but he held on tightly to the door frame, keeping himself upright. His breathing came out in heavy pants as he tried again and eventually was able to stumble into the hall. He braced himself against the wall and cringed slightly when he noticed the trail of blood that followed him with every step.

He internally apologized to whoever ended up having to clean that up.

His feet fumbled clumsily in front of the other as he took a few shaky steps. Finally, he looked up into the poorly lit hall and let out a quiet broken sound at the sight of Phil walking down the hall, his back turned to him.

His name spills from his lips before he can stop himself, "Phil..."

The angel stops in his tracks. The voice from behind him was weak but familiar. It sounded tired. Phil turned and saw a figure standing in the dark. His blonde hair was still unmistakable even in the dim light.

"Tommy? What're you doing out of bed, mate? Bad dream?" Phil asked. Concern prickled at him when he noticed the way the teen was leaning all of his weight into the door. Had he forgotten to eat again?

"Phil..." Tommy called out again and took a few unsteady steps forward.

Phil tilted his head in confusion. "You okay, kid? Did you hurt your ankle or something? Come, let's see."

He only wished that he'd known then how much he'd regret those words.

Tommy stepped into the moonlight.

Phil's eyes widened in horror. Tommy's hair hung in his eyes and blood was smeared across his chin. His entire body shook with exertion as he stepped forward again, nearly losing his balance as he pressed his blood-stained palm against the window. Phil's eyes trailed to Tommy's shoulders and then down to the floor. The red never stopped. *It just kept going.* His once pure white tunic now stained crimson.

His stomach lurched at the staggering amount of blood that trailed behind him.

It felt like being struck with the sword all over again. All the air was knocked from his lungs and no matter how hard he tried he couldn't inhale. And then Tommy looked up at him and his worst fear finally came true...once again.

Tommy reached out a hand to him and slurred quietly, "*Papa...help me...*"

The vision was real. He could finally see who he had tried so desperately hard to save and had failed over and over again.

It was Theseus.

Tommy was Theseus.

He had been right.

Tommy's legs gave out and Phil dove forward. He caught the teen in his arms and all his grief pooled to the surface as they fell to the ground. The boy fell lopsided in his arms, his legs sprawled out but his face was pressed into Phil's chest. Phil held him as tight as he dared and looked down at what he knew he'd find.

As soon as he saw the gashes in his son's back, Phil let out a sound of pure *anguish*. It was done. The gods had fulfilled their fucked up prophecy and taken Tommy's wings. *His son's*.

Tommy was his son.

"P-Phil...I have to...I have to t-tell you something..." Tommy leaned back with blood trailing down his chin.

"No, no, no. Not Tommy. *Please not Tommy*. " Phil cried out to the gods. They can't take him.

He looked down at the boy who seemed so small in his arms and promised, "No, I'm going to save you this time. *You're not going to die*. Just stay awake."

Then he screamed, "Help! Guards! Someone help!"

He wasn't going to lose him. Not again.

"D-Dad," Tommy gurgled and reached up shakily to grab at his sleeve. "I-I'm sorry..."

Phil shook his head and ripped off the robe from his back so he could press it tightly to where the blood was still seeping from where Tommy's wings had been mere hours ago. "Don't be sorry. I failed you. I failed you so badly, Theseus."

"Your Majesty!" A voice called from behind and Phil turned to quickly bark orders at the guards who'd come to his aid. He ignored their stunned looks at the sight of Tommy. "Get the doctor down here, now! Tell him it's an emergency and that Tommy is bleeding out. Put the castle on lockdown. Nobody goes in or out till we find out who did this. Search every fucking room! Do you understand?!"

"Yes, your Majesty," said one of the guards.

“Go! Now! And wake the Captain and the Chancellor!” Phil yelled. The guards sprinted off and Phil turned back to Tommy whose eyes were growing hazy. Phil gently ran his thumb over his cheek.

Tommy spoke urgently, as if he feared he’d never get the chance otherwise. Yet his voice was as fragile as glass as he asked, “You know who I am?”

Phil let out a sob and pressed his face into his hair. “You’re my Theseus. *My baby*. You came back. You came back to me.”

“I’m s-sorry I couldn’t....remember you. I-I didn’t mean...to forget,” Tommy whispered and Phil’s eyes widened.

“Wilbur! Techno! Get out here now!” He turned back to Tommy. “You are not going to die. I will not allow it.”

Tommy’s eyes were glazed and then he murmured tiredly, “I saw her, Dad. I saw her.”

Phil froze. *No, no, no. Please don’t take him, my love. Please.* “Technoblade! Wilbur!”

The door to Wilbur’s room bursts open as the twins came running out into the hall at the commotion. Phil saw Tommy look to the twins and a ghost of a smile graced his cheeks.

He sighed contently, the look of peace washing over him.

And then his eyes rolled to the back of his head and Tommy fell limp in his father’s arms as unconsciousness took him at last.

Chapter End Notes

okay i’m a little sorry this time

wELP THAT HAPPENED—

ANYWAY SEE YOU GUYS NEXT CHAPTER *runs*

If you liked this chapter then consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you liked the art for this chapter consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on twitter, tumblr, tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

When the Night Was Full of Terror

Chapter Notes

Hellooooo let's do this. I thank most of you for being very patient in waiting for this chapter and I hope you enjoy it:D

arbi threatened to hunt me down for sport for this chapter so have fun with that

TW: Blood and Gore. Accidental Character Injury.

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart <3

Word Count: 12.3k (oops)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur wasn't mad, he was fucking devastated.

Okay, he was slightly mad, but only because Techno had a solid reason for not telling him, and frankly it pissed him off.

"I wanted him to have today," Techno explained. "I wanted all of us to have today. If I had said anything... odds are the festival would've been canceled and I didn't want to do that to Tommy. I couldn't."

Motherfucker.

Wilbur had stopped yelling a while ago. His temper fizzled out as the reality of what just happened settled in and he couldn't bring himself to scream anymore. If he did he knew he'd start to cry and he wasn't sure he'd be able to stop.

"You don't hate me," Techno said after the two had lapsed into a tense silence. It wasn't a question.

No matter what venom had been exchanged between the two, Wilbur knew it to be true. They could yell, they could fight, and they could ignore one another. But never hate.

Wilbur shook his head. “I don’t have it in me to hate you. I could lie. But we’ve seen before how well that turns out.”

Techno simply nodded, deciding not to comment on that. Wilbur’s gaze turned to the door where he knew outside and down the hall his little broth...Thes...*Tommy* was hopefully sound asleep in his bed, home at long last.

Wilbur’s voice wavered as he said, “....He’s alive.”

“He’s alive,” Techno repeated, though more firmly.

“What do we do?” Wilbur asked.

“What do you mean?” Techno replied, but there was no trace of confusion in his question.

“Don’t play dumb,” Wilbur hissed.

“Telling him might make things worse.”

Wilbur’s head whipped to the side. “You don’t want to tell him?!”

“I...” Techno hesitated for a moment. “The kid’s been through enough. It might be better to wait. Maybe his memory will come back over time.”

“That’s all assuming he stays,” Wilbur pointed out.

“He will. He told me he wants to. After you ran off Tommy told me, *begged me*, that he wanted to stay. That he didn’t want to be alone anymore.”

“And what did you say?” Wilbur asked hesitantly.

“I told him he’d never have to be alone again.”

Wilbur nodded solemnly. He bit his lip harshly and his voice wavered when he asked, “I shouldn’t have run off. Not when he...he looked so terrified.”

“He doesn’t want to lose us.”

“But he did. For years. We lost him. And now...he’s like a ghost.” Wilbur’s head shot up, his expression distraught.

“No. He’s Tommy. He’s the same kid you danced with today and took to Niki’s bakery to get him to smile. The same kid who smacked me upside the head then saved my life using the same pan,” Techno said, shaking his head with a fond ghost of a smile on his face. “He’s the same kid he always was...it just turns out he’s also our little brother. He may not remember us, but he’s still Theseus.”

“What did they do to him?” Wilbur rasped, his voice unsteady. “Theseus was such a happy kid...and now...”

“He was never going to be the same, you know that,” Techno reminded.

“This whole time...I couldn’t figure out what was so special about Tommy. It’s just so effortless with him.” Wilbur inhaled shakily. “And now I know why. I always told myself it would be easier if Theseus was dead, at least I would know he wasn’t suffering...”

Techno’s fists were clenched tightly as Wilbur continued, “But he was alive this whole time. And he suffered *so much*, took so much abuse and we didn’t even try. We gave up on him. *I gave up on him.*” Wilbur turned to his brother. “How do I live with that?”

Techno was quiet for a long moment, refusing to meet his gaze until finally, he spoke, “You don’t have any other choice but to live with it.”

Wilbur's lower lip wobbled. "I-"

"Wilbur! Techno! Get out here now!" A voice from outside called and it felt like ice spiking through his veins as he instantly recognized its owner.

Techno stood, yanking Wilbur up with him. "*Phil*," He said with a note of terror in his voice that didn't belong there. Not from Techno. He was supposed to be the better of the two. Wilbur could fall to pieces as long as Techno held himself together.

"Technoblade! Wilbur!"

Wilbur forced himself to move and he was out the door in an instant with Techno right behind him. The two stumbled into the hallway in a blind panic, with Wilbur nearly losing his footing. Techno caught his elbow, keeping him from tumbling over and then he felt his twin tense at his side.

His brother's grip became painful.

"Tech-" Wilbur looked to Techno to get him to let go but his voice died in his throat at the look of pure horror in his crimson eyes.

Wilbur whipped his head around to what his brother stared at and a choked yelp exited his chest at what he saw. It felt like someone had kicked him in the stomach. His heart thudded painfully in his chest, trying to recover from the shock. But Wilbur couldn't breathe. He couldn't think. He couldn't cry out or scream. *He couldn't run.* This was not something he could run from.

There would be no more running from his problems. Not when this was the outcome.

Tommy. *Theseus*. His *little brother* was lying motionless in their father's arms surrounded by a pool of blood stemming from Tommy's back. *Right where his wings wou... Oh gods...*

He stared at Tommy with horror, disbelief, and terrible wretched guilt before finally, Wilbur wailed out a broken, “*No!*”

Techno’s expression crumpled and the man fell to his knees, frozen in fear. Wilbur sprinted to Tommy’s side and grabbed his hand, holding the bloody palm tightly within his own. Tommy’s eyes fluttered slightly at the touch but they refused to open any more than that. His breath was ragged and shallow, each inhale seemed to cause the boy more discomfort than it relieved. Tommy seemed so small curled up in Phil’s arms, who seemed desperate to try to hold the broken child together. It was then, Wilbur saw it as Phil shifted his grasp on Tommy. Hanging around his neck, stained with blood was Theseus’ necklace. Right where it belonged.

“*No, no, no. Tommy, no.*” Wilbur sobbed as his free hand came up to press against the teen’s alarmingly pale face. Tears already half-dried upon Tommy’s cheeks were carefully wiped away by Wilbur’s trembling fingers. Phil fought back his own tears as he continued to apply pressure to his back. Wilbur’s cries morphed into profuse apologies as he begged, “*Gods, I’m sorry. I’m so sorry I left. I’m so fucking sorry. Please look at me, Toms. Please, please.*”

Wilbur gently cradled Tommy’s face in his hands, trying to will the boy to hear his pleas. He wanted Tommy to look at him. He wanted to see the kid scowl at him in discontent and threaten to kick him for leaving. He wanted Tommy to scream curses against his name for being a coward. Wilbur let out a sob. He wanted Tommy to *smile* and sing for him again while weaving flowers into their brother’s hair. He would take the weight of the world upon his shoulders happily just to hear him laugh one more time.

“Open your eyes, blondie. You still have to find your new dream,” Wilbur whispered to him while his vision blurred with tears. And yet, Tommy was still.

Phil turned to Techno, who was still staring at Tommy as if the world was crumbling down around him, and shouted, “Technoblade! I need you!”

His twin blinked, momentarily confused, before something finally shook him from his daze. And then he was at Tommy’s side instantly, helping his father try to keep their little brother alive.

Techno’s face was devastated as he looked over at Tommy. A pained cry left him at the sight of the two deep gashes that now stood in the place of Tommy’s once beautiful red wings. They had been savagely ripped away from him. Tommy murmured something unintelligible in his delirium and Wilbur tried to catch every incoherent word, fearing they might be his last. Finally, Techno spoke, and his voice was hoarse, “Who did this? Who did this?”

It didn't seem like the question was aimed at Wilbur, Phil, or even Tommy. It seemed more like Techno was asking someone who could not answer him. The gods maybe.

"What do we do?" Wilbur cried to Phil. His father looked back at him and Wilbur felt like he was eleven years old again. Staring into the eyes of a man gutted in terror. He saw weakness, he saw fear, he saw shame.

His father didn't know what to do. Wilbur shook his head. "Dad. Dad, *please*. I can't be the only one not falling apart. I can't be the stable one. I'm not strong like you and Techno. Please tell me what to do. I need you. *Tommy needs you.*"

Phil's mouth opened, speechless for a moment until he looked down at Theseus. And as blood began to trail down from Tommy's lips, a new kind of terror bloomed within them all. Phil's eyes hardened and he choked out, "Infirmary. Bad won't get here in time so we need to get Tommy to him."

"Is it safe to move him?" Wilbur asked, running a comforting hand through Tommy's sweat-soaked hair.

Phil shook his head. "We don't have a choice. He needs blood and he needs it now." Phil looked at Techno. "*Tech.*"

His brother didn't respond. His eyes were glazed over and seemed to be murmuring something to himself. Wilbur's eyes widened as he recognized the sign that his Chat was taking over. Techno had been pushed far back into his own head. So when Techno didn't respond the next time Phil called his name, Wilbur did the only thing he could think of. He slapped his twin hard across the jaw.

Techno growled and his head shot up ready for a fight. He didn't miss the almost glowing effect in Techno's eyes. Wilbur raised his hands in surrender and spoke quickly while he had his attention, "Techno. Chat. Whoever the hell is in there. I need you to take Tommy to the infirmary. You're faster than Phil and I. Tommy will...*die* if he doesn't get there, do you understand?"

Techno's eyes filled with tears and Wilbur bit hard against his cheek. He hated seeing his twin cry more than anything. He hated it so fucking much. Techno doesn't cry. At least not in front of others. And rarely in front of him.

I don't want to be strong. Wilbur thought. *It's not supposed to be me.*

Wilbur joked often that he was the eldest. He didn't actually know if it was true. He had no idea if it was he or Techno who had been born first. But he was taller so Wilbur had proclaimed as soon as they'd been able to walk he was the oldest. Wilbur let a sob bubble out of his chest.

He didn't want to be the eldest right now. Techno had always protected him. Had comforted him and soothed him when he cried. He had been there for him on the days he felt his mind might fall apart. The days he felt he might truly go insane.

"Please," Wilbur begged and hooked his arms beneath Tommy, lifting him out of their father's arms. Tommy let out a garbled moan of pain and Wilbur murmured to the boy, "Sorry, Toms. We've got to get you help. Just a little longer." He stretched out his arms to Techno, handing Tommy over, and pleaded, "I need you to carry him. I can't do it. I need you to be the oldest. I've never been able to carry either of you and I'm so sorry. Please, Tech."

Techno stared at him for a long moment and Wilbur wasn't sure if it was his twin he saw or Chat. But regardless they took Tommy from his arms. Techno gathered him up in one arm and smoothed back Tommy's hair with his other hand. His touch was gentle, apologies danced across his fingertips. Tommy leaned into it and weakly slurred, "Tech...no?"

Wilbur let out a small gasp as he saw Tommy's eyelids flutter briefly and Techno nodded. His voice was weak and just barely put together. "Yeah, it's me. I've got you, kid."

Tommy hummed in response, seeming content for a moment. That was until he whimpered out, "*Don't...leave me.*"

Wilbur's heart shattered.

But before either of them could say anything, Phil urged them up to their feet. "You have to get him out of here, *now*. We need to go."

Tommy groaned at the movement, tears streamed down his cheeks. Techno muttered quiet apologies under his breath and Wilbur prayed desperately that Tommy would pass out again. The dead sprint to the Infirmary would be *agony* if he was already in so much pain simply being shifted.

Techno realized this too but there was no other option. So instead his brother turned to him and nodded solemnly before shooting off down the hallway. Wilbur pretended not to hear the way Tommy screamed. It only lasted for a few seconds however before the teen went silent.

Wilbur felt his knees give out and he fell into his father's arms, sobbing, "*It was him...*this whole time it was *him*. What if he...? Did we lose him again tonight?"

He felt his father's arms wrap around him while Wilbur entwined his own around his father's neck, burying his face into his shoulder like a small child. He felt his father's wings brush against his shoulder and then Phil spoke, "Don't talk like that. *Don't*. He's gonna be fine. I failed him once but I won't fail him now."

Wilbur nodded into his father's shoulder but all he truly wanted to do in that moment was *scream*.

When they arrived at the Infirmary, Badboyhalo was already there. His son, Dapper stood by his side, a wad of bandages and other supplies in his hands. "I ran into His Highness and...Tommy along the way," Bad explained.

He then spoke quickly, walking them both down the hall and into the Infirmary. "He'll need surgery to repair the damage. I need to make sure this hasn't paralyzed him before I stitch him up. Skeppy is setting things up now. But before anything, he needs blood. I need to figure out if any of you might be a match."

Wilbur looked up and just barely spotted a flash of golden hair in the next room.

Bad was nothing if not terribly blunt. In times like this, he tended to set aside bedside manners and preferred to be as upfront as possible. Wilbur was grateful for it even though the news that Tommy could be paralyzed made him want to hurl. Phil swallowed the information with grace and was quick to intervene. "I am."

The doctor shook his head, “All due respect, Your Majesty, I don’t know for sure, not all avians have the same blood type and Tommy is—”

“Theseus,” Phil said outright. Bad’s face froze. “Tommy is *Theseus*. He was created by the same hands that crafted me millennia ago. I’m as sure a match as anyone and there is no time to argue. He needs the blood now, right?”

Bad nodded, seemingly in shock for a moment before Dapper nudged his father’s side and whispered something to him. Wilbur was able to easily pick up on it. Hybrid hearing was weird like that.

“*Focus, Papa,*” Dapper said and Wilbur nodded at the child, grateful.

Bad let the news sink in a moment longer and then nodded. “Very well.” He grabbed Phil by his arm. “Right...then there is no time to lose, come with me.”

Bad dragged Phil off into the room next to where Tommy was currently being prepped for surgery. Every groan and cry of pain he heard from the room burned like a fire inside Wilbur. He curled himself just outside of Theseus’ room, forcing himself to listen to every noise, every sound of anguish his brother made. Because it was his fault. Wilbur had left him alone. Had abandoned him like a coward. And because of it, Tommy had been permanently maimed. It was Wilbur’s fault, right?

And when Tommy eventually grew quiet, Wilbur realized hearing nothing at all was a different kind of hell.

Minutes seemed to stretch into agonizing hours and Wilbur stayed there curled up in silence. His brother paced endlessly around the room, muttering to himself. Occasionally he would stop, look in the doorway and then continue pacing. Wilbur didn’t see the point in it, he preferred to rot in silence.

It seemed however that silence was not meant to last because eventually, the booming voice of Schlatt grabbed his attention. He looked up, not sure how long it had been since he’d first sat down, and saw two figures just outside the doorway. Tubbo trailed behind his father, his face pale and his eyes anxious. He seemed to be hiding in his father’s shadow. It was a sight he had not seen in a long time.

Meanwhile, Schlatt looked to be arguing with a guard who didn't seem too keen on letting the Chancellor through. The guard said something to the man and the man glowered at him. "No, I don't want your flimsy explanations. I'd rather hear from the Emperor himself what's going on, and so would my son. Now *move out of my way, pest.*"

Schlatt was the last person anyone would want to stand in the way of when it came to his family. Wilbur pitied the poor guard. He gathered his employment here would not be a long one.

Wilbur stood shakily to his feet as Schlatt shoved the guard aside and marched into the room. His eyes scanned around, probably searching for Phil. They landed on his own for a moment and Schlatt's expression flickered nervously. He turned to look inside the Infirmary and his eyes widened. He faltered for maybe a second, horror haunting his expression as he saw what Wilbur could only presume to be Tommy. And then he spun around, and just before Tubbo could peer in as well, Schlatt shielded his eyes. His normally calm and charismatic voice shook uncharacteristically as he told Tubbo, "Don't look. Don't look. You don't want to see this."

Schlatt urged his son towards Wilbur, practically shoving the teen into his arms. He nodded at Wilbur and ran into the next door. Wilbur just faintly heard Schlatt call to Bad before the door slammed behind him.

Meanwhile, Wilbur looked down and hands hung uncertainty around Tubbo for a long moment, unsure of what to do. The smaller boy trembled in his arms, his face was pressed into Wilbur's jacket.

How was he supposed to do this? How was he supposed to tell Tubbo the fate that had befallen his friend? How would he tell Tubbo what had happened? Tubbo decided for him. He looked up at Wilbur and croaked, "*Just say it.*"

Wilbur swallowed but nodded. "It's Theseus. Tommy is Theseus." Wilbur ran a hand through the boy's hair, the way he'd done when he was little.

Tubbo sucked in a breath and then asked almost inaudibly, "What happened?"

No. No, he didn't want to say it. Because then it was *real*. But what choice did he have? He couldn't keep the tears out of his voice as he explained, "Someone broke in, I think. I don't know

exactly what happened but Dad found him. They...they took his wings. Ripped them out by the roots.”

Tubbo’s face froze in time, unable to process what Wilbur had just told him. After all, how could he? Tubbo stumbled back and shook his head. “No...No, no, I just...I just talked to him. I don’t... How..?”

Wilbur couldn’t help it as he asked, “What do you mean, ‘you just talked to him’?”

Tubbo kept backing away, no longer meeting Wilbur’s gaze. Wilbur reached out a hand but the boy flinched.

Tubbo buried his hands into his hair and his voice broke, “No..no, no...I told him to...He..”

And with that...Tubbo ran. Or at least tried to. He was almost through the door when Techno appeared out of nowhere and grabbed the kid by the back of his vest. He wrapped his arms around his waist and pulled him back all the while Tubbo kicked and flailed. Techno’s voice was strained tight and hardly sounded like his own, “We’re on lockdown. You can’t run off on your own. The bastards who did this could still be out there.”

Tubbo didn’t really seem to care and screamed, “Let me go! Let me go! I have to finish it!”

“No!” Techno argued, trying to get a better hold on the boy but Tubbo had always been hard to catch, even for Techno.

His twin grunted when Tubbo harshly struck him in the ribs with his elbow. Wilbur felt like a statue, unable to force himself to move. Tubbo let out a mournful wail that felt like a knife through Wilbur’s already broken heart. “It’s my fault...my fault!”

“What’s going on out here?” Schlatt appeared in the doorway and in that brief second Techno turned to look behind him, Tubbo slipped from his hold and bolted out the door.

“*Goddammit. Tubbo!*” Schlatt yelled. He then turned to the guard and snapped, “Go do your fucking job and bring him back. I can’t leave the Emperor and my son cannot be roaming the halls. If you don’t bring him back safe and sound, I’ll throw your ass in a cell and make you wish you were dead.”

The guard paled and turned outside the door to bark an order at another guard in the hall. Meanwhile, Schlatt growled under his breath, “Where the fuck is Ted when you need him...”

While part of Wilbur wanted to go after Tubbo as well, he knew he wouldn’t be allowed to leave the room. The perpetrators could still be lurking around and the Crown Princes could not be out in the open.

Wilbur had never felt so helpless in his life. Everything was out of his hands and it was absolute *torture*.

“I’ll kill whoever did this...” Techno’s voice growled out from across the room. Wilbur turned. His twin had stopped pacing and was now leaning against a wall, looking into the infirmary. Wilbur didn’t understand how he was able to stomach watching them try to put Tommy back together. “*I’ll make them suffer*. They’ll beg for a quick death. I’ll hunt them down like dogs.” Though Wilbur wasn’t sure who he was talking to. More than likely it was his Chat.

“We can’t leave him,” Wilbur pointed out. He slid back down to sit against the wall outside the door and grabbed Techno’s gaze. “You heard Tommy. We have to stay. You can’t run off.”

Techno glared at him but Wilbur could see the acknowledgment in his eyes. Techno knew he was right. And he hated it.

“I can’t just do *nothing*. Look what they did to him. To our *brother*.” Techno gritted his teeth.

“I won’t abandon Tommy over some lust for vengeance and neither will you. Understand?” Wilbur growled and then his eyes softened as he asked, “Haven’t we fucked this up enough?”

Techno turned his face away, deciding the floor was suddenly rather interesting.

“Technoblade,” Wilbur barked. “Promise me.”

Techno glowered, eyes dark with anger. “You want them dead too. I can see it plain as day. You pretend that you're not as violent and bloodthirsty as I am but you're a liar. I know what you are. You want to watch the life drain away from their faces. You want to break whoever hurt him. I know you do.”

Wilbur stood to his feet. Anger swirled inside his chest. “What am I?”

Techno grinned sadistically. “You're a piglin. That's something you can't run from, is it? We're violent creatures, Wilbur. Monsters.”

Take it back. Take it back. Take it back.

His blood boiled and for a split second, he nearly lost himself. He nearly gave into what he'd spent his whole life stuffing as far down as he could. He wasn't about to prove Techno right.

He marched up to his twin but instead of yelling and screaming at Techno for being an ass, Wilbur furrowed his brow and hissed, *“Promise me. Now.”*

Techno's gaze darkened and the two stared each other down, the tension thick enough to cut through. For a split second, Wilbur wondered if Techno might finally snap and rage at him without restraint. It had been a long time since either of them had been this unhinged.

And then Techno exhaled and dropped his head. “Fine,” He agreed and turned away.

Wilbur wasn't entirely sure he meant it but it was enough for now.

“Primes. Could you two please try not to kill each other?” A voice called out and the two turned to see Phil standing in the doorway looking rather pale and unsteady.

Wilbur's eyes widened and Techno was at his side in the blink of an eye lending him his shoulder. Wilbur sputtered, "Gods, Phil. How much did you let Bad take?!"

"As much as he'd let me give before informing me that I might go into cardiac arrest if I gave any more." Phil's voice wobbled a bit as Techno sat him down on the waiting room couch.

"What about Tommy. Is he—?" Techno began but Phil cut him off.

"They took me into the other room. I didn't get to see him. Schlatt did. Though he was rather vague with the details. They gave him something to keep him sedated. And with the blood, his heart will be strong enough to move on to repairing the damage. Bad said he'd be able to get more blood later tonight from another donor," Phil sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Now we wait."

"Phil." Schlatt appeared from the Infirmary and tossed the man something that Wilbur quickly recognized. He raised an eyebrow. It had been some time since he had seen his father's cane. Phil only really ever used it on his bad days, whenever the phantom pain from the sword resurfaced. It was also used to whack people (Schlatt) in the ankles for irritating him. "I have to go find Tubbo but I'll be back. I'll see if I can send Puffy your way. Her guard is still searching the grounds."

Phil caught the cane by the shaft and leaned against the handle, carved to look like the head of a crow. He nodded to the man appreciatively. "Someone needs to wake Ranboo. They should know what's happening. It'll be easier if we're all in one space."

Schlatt nodded affirmatively and was out the door without another word. As soon as he was gone Phil turned to the two and frowned. "You two shouldn't be fighting. Not now. You're better than that."

"Are we?" Wilbur asked petulantly.

"I have failed you as a father if you're not."

Wilbur clamped his mouth shut. Techno looked away. The room lapsed into silence. It felt like the first moment of *real* quiet since this nightmare had begun and to Wilbur, it felt like a prison sentence, the silence flooded his mind like an empty void. He found himself longing for the

ambiance his twin had provided when he'd been muttering and pacing around earlier. At least then he'd been able to focus on that.

"He knew who he was. At least in that moment..." Phil whispered into the quiet, snapping it like a pencil between his fingers. Wilbur bit his tongue suddenly and winced.

"He—" Wilbur began but Phil raised a hand.

"I can only tell you what I know. But when I found him...or rather *he found me*...he recognized me. Not as the Emperor, but as his father."

"But how?" Techno asked. "The last time we saw him was on the roof. He had no idea what was happening. That was at most two hours ago."

Wilbur furrowed his brow. "What changed?"

Phil shook his head and his shoulders slumped wearily. "I suppose only Tommy can answer that."

If he lives that is.

Wilbur curled in on himself. The thought sat heavy in his chest refusing to leave him.

There wasn't much to say after that. Not when Tommy's life hung so precariously over their heads. Like a candle struggling to stay aflame despite the fact that it had been scarcely used. Wilbur wasn't sure he could survive losing Theseus a second time. He wasn't sure any of them could.

To die twice was cruel. But to live through it, to witness it twice over, was far crueler.

Wilbur looked at his hands. They were stained red not with the blood of the boy in the other room, but by the hands of the inhumane.

How the hell did he not see it? It was so painfully obvious to him now.

Tommy was Theseus.

The wit. The sass. The brash and bold behavior hidden behind a thick wall of insecurity and trauma. The golden hair. The blue eyes. The way he looked like a carbon-copy version of Phil the same way Tubbo did to him. And he'd clicked so quickly with Tubbo and Ranboo. He had everyone he came in contact with wrapped around his finger.

Of course, Tommy was Theseus. It was right there in front of his face. Clear as day.

His nephew was alive. His nephew had miraculously been brought home without anybody realizing it. His nephew had been brutally maimed and gods only knew what else. Theseus could die before Schlatt ever had the chance to tell him he was sorry for not being fast enough that night.

Tubbo might never get to see Tommy again.

"Kid, if you die I'm dragging you back from hell myself. Your mother owes me big time anyway," Schlatt muttered beneath his breath, rounding the corner towards Tubbo's lab. He had already sent out a guard to bring Ranboo and mentioned that the palace chef should be alerted to the news as well.

He wasn't sure there was a force on Earth that could stop Quackity from getting where he wanted to be. Given that the entire palace was currently being searched top to bottom, he was sure Quackity had realized by now something was amiss. He wouldn't be surprised if he was already halfway to Wilbur.

Under lighter circumstances, Schlatt would admit it was quite charming to see how devoted the two were to one another; all while still remaining embarrassingly oblivious to the fact that the only thing keeping them apart was their own stubbornness. Phil would've teased Wilbur for it had Schlatt not reminded him that it had taken him over four hundred years, plus a thousand more as a vegetable, to propose to his wife.

The point was, Wilbur didn't need to be alone with his thoughts right now. So Schlatt was more than happy to point Quackity in the right direction.

But now was not the time to be thinking of that. Not when his son had once again run off. Not that he blamed him of course. How could he, given the circumstances? His childhood best friend was back from the dead and now fighting for his life. He'd run too if he were him. Maybe that's why Schlatt knew exactly where the kid had run off to.

His safe place. His laboratory. The same one he was currently grounded from but Schlatt was willing to let it slide for now. Tonight had surely been punishment enough.

As he rounded the corner to Tubbo's lab, he raised an eyebrow when he saw Ted posted outside his door barking orders to a rather sheepish-looking guard.

"...well go fucking check again! And use your own brain for a change instead of mine! *Don't disappoint me,*" Ted snapped. The guard nodded before scurrying away just before Schlatt could get a word in.

Ted turned and his eyes softened at the sight of the Chancellor, "Chancellor." Ted nodded his head. "The kid locked the doors but he's in there. He's working on...something, not sure what."

Schlatt knocked on the door rather harshly and spoke loudly, "Tubbo, open the door."

There was the sound of something clattering against the ground and Tubbo hissed, "Go away. I'm fucking fine just leave me be."

I think the fuck not.

Schlatt turned to Ted. "I can handle it from here, go relieve that idiotic guard at the infirmary and stand guard for the royal family. I'll bring Tubbo back as soon as I can."

Ted furrowed his brow. "But your lordship, if someone--"

“I’m more than capable of defending myself and my son,” Schlatt interrupted.

“Yes, because you defended yourself *so well* the last time an intruder broke in,” Ted snapped back. If it had been anyone else, they would’ve been fired on the spot and probably punched in the face.

Instead, Schlatt sneered. “Just do what I ask. That’s an *order*.”

Ted seemed unsure for a moment before finally he huffed and pulled his sword from his sheath, handing it to Schlatt. Schlatt grabbed the handle and Ted frowned. “*Fine*. Here, take this just in case.”

Ted pulled away and sped off. Schlatt sheathed the sword into his belt loop and knocked on the door again. “Tubbo Underscore. Open the door before I kick it in. There’s a window in that room which means someone could get in. You have nothing to defend yourself with.”

Schlatt heard his son cuss under his breath, “The hell I don’t.”

Right. The gun.

And then his ear flicked to the side as he heard something else. Tubbo hissed in what sounded like pain and then sniffled.

“What the fuck are you doing in there?”

“Nothing!” Tubbo shouted but Schlatt could hear the shakiness of his voice. And then something fell again and this time Schlatt heard something shatter. His son cried out, “*Dammit! Why can’t I do this?*”

Schlatt had had enough. “Tubbo you have ten seconds to either open the door or get out of the way before I kick it in.”

There was no response, only the continuous sound of something hitting the table and then breaking. Schlatt counted back in his head and then slammed his foot just under the handle of the door. The wood splintered away and the door swung open.

Schlatt rushed inside and sucked in a breath at the sight of his son's hands. The kid had removed his gloves presumably for precision and Schlatt winced at the sight. They were bleeding badly from several cuts and scrapes to his fingers that definitely seemed unintentional.

Tubbo didn't acknowledge him as he came in. Instead, he continued to hunch over his work with a sharp shard of glass clenched tightly in his fist that was streaked with blood. In his other hand, he held a glass cutter.

"Fucking hell..." Schlatt gasped and then quickly moved to grab his kid by his wrist, pulling him away from the table. Tubbo screeched and flailed and Schlatt wrapped an arm around his waist, picking him up off the ground.

Tubbo kicked back and Schlatt pressed back into the door to get a better hold on his hand.

"Stop! Stop! Let me go!" Tubbo screamed and that's when Schlatt saw the tears streaming down his son's cheeks. He bit into his cheek harshly as Schlatt pried open his son's hand forcing him to release the glass cutting harshly into his palm.

Tubbo cried out as it shattered onto the floor and wailed, "No, that was it! I almost had it!"

"Tubbo, stop it! Look at what you're doing!" Schlatt yelled.

His son shook his head frantically. "No, no, you don't understand! I have to finish it!"

Schlatt slid down to the floor and pulled his son to his chest. He quickly grabbed Tubbo's other arm and yanked the glass cutter from him, throwing it out of reach. "Calm down! What are you talking about? Finish what?"

“The compass!” Tubbo sobbed, still trying to free himself. “Tommy needs it and I never finished it for him! I started it years ago and never finished it because I thought he...I gave up...”

“The what?” Schlatt didn’t understand but he looked over to the boy’s workbench and could see what appeared to be two compasses, both unfinished. Suddenly the glass cutter made more sense. Tubbo had been trying to cut the glass into the correct shape and had failed multiple times given the amount of blood and broken glass on the table.

The sight made Schlatt’s stomach curl nauseously. He turned back to his son and pinned his arms to his sides. He hugged the shaking and weeping boy tight even though he continued to struggle against him. “The compass. S-so I don’t lose him again...it’s my fault h-he...”

Schlatt shushed him. “It is not your fault, do you understand me? None of this is your fault.”

“No, y-you don’t understand.” Tubbo cried, starting to calm down a bit. He shifted in his father’s arms till he could look at him and admitted, “I told Tommy to go into the Nursery. I told him he was Theseus. It’s my fault he was alone. It’s my fault he was...”

Schlatt released one of his arms so he could press his son’s head to his chest. He murmured to the boy, “You couldn’t have known. You were just trying to help. It’s not your fault.”

“B-but...” Tubbo began but Schlatt shook his head.

“If someone came through the Nursery, which is almost always locked, then they weren’t targeting him at random. They knew where he was and wanted to get him alone. If he hadn’t been in the Nursery, he would’ve gone to his room. And they would have gotten him anyway.” Finally, Schlatt let go and grabbed his son by the shoulders. He shook him gently as he told him, “This is *not* your fault, Tubbo.”

Tubbo’s eyes were blurry with tears and he asked in a small voice, “Is he going to die?”

Schlatt’s heart panged mournfully, but he had to be honest. His son deserved the truth. “I...I don’t know. I hope not. But I will not allow you to bury yourself in guilt for something you didn’t cause.”

“I didn’t mean to...And the glass...I.. I’m sorry, Dad.” Tubbo tried to explain, his voice still thick with tears. He looked down at his hands and winced as if suddenly realizing how badly he’d accidentally injured himself. “Shit...what did I...?”

Schlatt stood from the ground, pulling Tubbo up with him. He walked over to his desk, careful to avoid the broken glass on the ground, and then opened the bottom drawer, pulling out a medkit Tubbo kept. He turned to his son. “Don’t apologize. Come on, let’s get you cleaned up.”

“I didn’t mean to...” Tubbo said again and Schlatt nodded.

“I know you didn’t. You were in shock and weren’t thinking clearly. It was just an accident,” Schlatt assured him. “You have every reason to be upset right now, Tubbo. No one, especially not I, would judge you for it. Of course, I wish you had decided on a less *dangerous* hobby as your coping mechanism.”

Tubbo let out the tiniest tearful chuckle at that and Schlatt gave a small smile.

Then Tubbo frowned. “My hands kept shaking, so I kept breaking the glass and...y’know. I thought if I was quick enough...maybe...I don’t know. It makes less sense now and all I ended up doing was fucking up my hands.”

“When Phil was hurt the night Theseus was taken, after I’d been shot, I thought it was more important to get to Puffy and tell her what had happened rather than patch myself up. Dying over a message wouldn’t have done me any favors. We do stupid things when we’re upset.” Schlatt pulled out the disinfectant from the kit and Tubbo paled considerably. He winced, apologetic already. “Yeah, I won’t lie, kid. This is gonna *suck*.”

“I better be ungrounded after this,” Tubbo gritted through his teeth preemptively.

Schlatt shrugged as he wet a clean rag with the antiseptic. “Sure. But good luck getting Ranboo to let you work on anything with your hands.”

Tubbo huffed, exasperated and suddenly annoyed. He held out his hands and groaned, “...*Shit*.”

“Sir you can’t be in here right now. Only the royal family are permitted wit—“

The sudden break in silence startled Wilbur from his mindless thoughts.

Wilbur, with his eyes still red and swollen from crying, looked up at the commotion. Through blurry vision, he saw a man with dark hair and golden wings standing in the doorway arguing with that same stupid guard who’d tried to bar Schlatt earlier.

“Yeah, yeah. *Quitate a la verga de mi camino!* I’ve known this family since long before you were employed here. Probably before you ever even picked up a sword. *No me vas a detener, pinche pendejo!*”

Like the strike of a match, Wilbur stirred back to life. *Quackity...*

From where Wilbur sat on the ground, curled up with his knees to his chest as if trying to shield his heart from further damage, red met warm, nearly golden brown eyes that belonged to the man who would protect him far better than any shield could. Quackity was not a fighter by any means but there was no one else Wilbur trusted more with his heart.

You need to get up. Tell the guard to let him through. You need him.

Wilbur’s body felt like lead as he shakily stood. Techno briefly looked up from the other side of the room, waking from his doze at the commotion. Wilbur’s voice was hoarse as he spoke, “Let him through.”

The guard turned to the prince, baffled. “But your Highness! He’s a peasant, surely not...”

Whatever remained of Wilbur’s composure and patience *snapped* as anger ripped through him hard, fast, and out of nowhere. He pushed himself off the wall and grabbed the guard by his collar so fast that Quackity stumbled back a bit in shock. Wilbur shoved the pitiful excuse for protection against the doorframe and grinned internally at the pure fear he saw in his eyes. He growled darkly,

“Say that again and I’ll have your tongue cut out. Better yet I’ll do it myself. But if I ever hear you question me or my family again, your head won’t be long after.”

“Wilbur,” Phil chided, though looking over to where he was currently resting against the couch he did spot the faintest trace of pride in his father’s expression. “Enough.”

Wilbur huffed, the sound was primal and far too piglinish for his liking. He shoved the guard out of his way, sneering as he tumbled to the ground. He wanted to do more. He wanted to *hurt him*. He was angry and it wasn’t just because of the snide comment on Quackity’s status. It was all of it. *Everything*. Someone had snuck into the castle with the sole intention of hurting Tommy. A *kid*.

Wilbur of course had known Tommy wasn’t eighteen. Everyone knew it. But to learn that he was just *barely* sixteen years old made him nauseated.

His litt-...Wilbur swallowed. Did Wilbur even deserve to call him his brother at this point? Angry tears prickled at his vision. He’d called Tommy ‘sunshine’ once as a joke. A stupid, somewhat embarrassingly cutesy nickname used solely to tease the boy. But there was so much truth in it.

Tommy was sunshine. He was *good*. What kind of pure evil hurts not just a person, but *a child* with a golden heart?

Maybe Techno was right. Maybe vengeance wasn’t such a bad idea. Maybe Wilbur should-

The gentle feeling of hands pressed against his cheeks tore Wilbur from his anger. “Where are you?” whispered the owner of the hands. “Come back.”

And that’s all it took for the rage to hide away again, to tuck itself into the deepest corner of Wilbur’s mind for another time. *His* voice. Wilbur looked down to meet Quackity’s gaze and the man gave him the smallest of smiles and said almost inaudibly, “There you are.”

Wilbur opened his mouth to speak but found himself at a stalemate with everything he wanted to say in that moment and that which he truly *didn’t*. Yet it was the things he didn’t want to voice that needed to be said the most.

It was Quackity, however, who spoke first, his eyes subtly drifting to the blood stained into his collar. Tommy's blood. "They told me something happened to Tommy. That someone broke in? What happened?"

Wilbur wanted to cry again. He wanted to fall apart and let someone else pick up the pieces. And yet he stayed whole, for Tommy.

"Someone attacked Tommy...and...and they took his wings, Q. They took them from him," Wilbur admitted, his voice torn. "He's in surgery. *Gods...he's just a kid.* I-...there's more but I-I...*shit.*"

Quackity looked aghast as the news sunk in. As an avian, Quackity of course knew how important someone's wings were to them. Wings were a source of great pride. A piece of history that bonded them to the sky, even though they'd never be able to reach it on their own.

And Tommy's had been taken from him in the most brutal way imaginable.

"What do you need?" Quackity whispered, his voice chasing the dark away, grounding him, and asking for nothing in return. His thumbs came up to swipe away as much grief as he could but it was an impossible task for just one man. Wilbur threaded his fingers overtop his hands and leaned his forehead to press against the other's shoulder.

Wilbur squeezed his eyes shut and swallowed as he asked, "Stay with me?"

Quackity nodded, leaning his head against Wilbur's. "I'll stay as long as you'll have me."

Wilbur supposed now was not the time to let Quackity know the answer to that was *forever*. Then again...Wilbur was pretty sure Quackity knew the answer anyway.

Quackity's eyes never left his as he pulled Wilbur from the doorway and brought him over to a small loveseat sitting in the far corner of the room, away from the wall Wilbur had been hunched over in, torturing himself with Tommy's cries, even though they had long since died out.

When Wilbur tried to argue, Quackity pulled him down onto the couch and his words were like ether, soothing to his aching soul, “You’ve done enough, Wil. There’s nothing more to do for Tommy that’s in our hands. Take a moment.”

Quackity didn’t understand. He couldn’t rest now. It wasn’t just Tommy. It was- “Theseus,” Wilbur choked out and Quackity furrowed his brow, confused.

Wilbur’s shoulders shook as he tried not to break down. He inhaled deeply through his nose and trembled. “*Tommy is Theseus.*”

Just as the implications of his words dawned on Quackity, something smacked to the ground and they both turned to see...Ranboo.

The boy stared at him, almost unsure if they’d heard him correctly but terrified nonetheless. Ranboo was still wearing their gardening gloves and was covered in dirt. Wilbur guessed he’d been with Niki and Jack in their garden when they’d heard the news. Wilbur looked down to see a large book and a handful of Alliums scattered on the ground.

It seemed the prince had made a run for Tommy the moment they found out he was hurt, not even bothering to set down their things.

And then, just before hell broke loose...Bad finally emerged from the Infirmary.

Wilbur shot to his feet in an instant and darted past Ranboo and over to the doctor, who at the very least had bothered to wash the blood of his brother from himself. Phil and Techno were not far behind him.

Wilbur didn’t even give the man the chance to close the door behind him before he blurted out, “How is he? Is he...?”

Bad raised a hand signaling the prince to wait as he shut the door and then he turned and clasped his hands together. His face was grim which sent shockwaves of terror down his veins but then Bad said, “He’s alive. He’ll be okay.”

Wilbur nearly collapsed in relief. Tommy was going to live. *He was going to live. Theseus was going to live.* He's alive. *He's alive.* Wilbur staggered back a bit and felt his father's hand come to steady him. He turned and saw tears welled up in Phil's eyes, already beginning to spill down his cheeks. Techno had his eyes shut tight and his head slightly bowed. And then he sucked in a sharp breath and released it slowly before looking at Wilbur.

And just like that, all was forgiven and forgotten between the two. It didn't matter now. Theseus was going to be okay and he was *finally* home. The rest could be put aside for now.

"The damage done to his back was *extensive*, especially since it seemed there was already plenty of trauma there beforehand. Miraculously, however, I saw nothing that would indicate any long-lasting effects for now. I loathe to admit but whoever attacked Tommy-pardon me, *His Highness*, knew what they were doing. It was a clean job," Bad admitted sourly.

Before Bad could continue however a voice from behind them, small and shaky asked, "Wait, what was 'a clean job'? What do you mean?"

Ranboo.

Someone had to tell him. If anyone knew the pain Tommy had experienced tonight it was them. And now? Because of Tommy, Ranboo's wings had been healed. And not a day later, Tommy had lost his own.

"Ranboo," Techno called and set one of his hands on the prince's shoulders. His voice was steady and the most put-together Wilbur had seen since this nightmare had begun. "I need you to listen to me and try not to cry when I tell you this. Can you do that?"

Ranboo grabbed Techno's forearm. Their tone was low and serious, as they asked, "Techno, what happened to Tommy?"

Techno's response was blunt which maybe was what Ranboo needed to hear. "Someone tore out his wings."

The room became so silent Wilbur could hear his heart beating in his ears. Ranboo's hands shook as they came up to hug themselves. Ranboo looked to Phil, hoping it was some horrid joke but no. It

was real.

“*What?*” Ranboo was so quiet. Their voice hardly above a whisper. “No...No, he was with you. How did...?”

Techno swallowed harshly. “After the lanterns...That’s when Wilbur figured it out and because of it we got into a fight. I sent Tommy back to his room.”

Ranboo’s fists clenched tightly and their voice broke as they whimpered out, “*He was alone?*”

Wilbur swallowed heavily but nodded. He saw Techno come up to set a hand against the enderling’s shoulder but Ranboo flinched. Ranboo met Wilbur’s gaze and for a moment, Wilbur saw anger. Uncharacteristic, fiery anger meant solely for him.

Anger that accused him and screamed, “*You knew who he was and you left him alone.*”

But this was Ranboo. Sweet, kind, forgiving Ranboo. Who never raised their voice, or argued, or got angry. But he saw anger now. Anger that Wilbur knew they would never vocalize or acknowledge. So, Wilbur did it for them.

“If I could change it, *I would.*”

Ranboo’s lip wobbled, and Wilbur could see their anger disappear as quickly as it had sparked. Sometimes it was infuriating to Wilbur that Ranboo could have such control on their emotions while Wilbur’s burned so often out of his control.

Granted they had learned control from Puffy and Techno, but Wilbur had never been able to understand their teachings no matter how hard he tried. It was simply Wilbur’s nature to burn.

“When you lose your wings, you lose a part of yourself. You can still feel them, that never goes away. I didn’t lose mine, mine were torn to *shreds*. But I still felt the wind catch between my wings, despite the gaping holes.” Tears began to form in Ranboo’s eyes, and he hissed out in pain. Wilbur

quickly handed the teen tissues. Ranboo ignored the gesture and turned to Techno as water streamed down his cheeks. “You knew too?”

His mentor nodded and grabbed a handful of tissues himself, shoving it into Ranboo’s hands. Ranboo looked more disappointed now than angry at Techno’s answer. “Does he even know who he is? Did you tell him?”

“Tubbo said he tried to, but it seems like Tommy figured it out on his own. And then...” Phil trailed off, sounding pained.

Ranboo nodded and blotted away their tears. They turned back to Wilbur. “I was alone when it happened to me. Knowing you’re totally alone when someone...It’s not a pain I’d wish on *anyone*.”

Wilbur’s eyes never left the floor, but he nodded his head. There was a long moment of silence before he heard his father ask Bad, “Can we see him?”

Wilbur raised his head.

The doctor was contemplative for a second before eventually he nodded. “Yes. He’s not awake yet and won’t be for a while.” Suddenly he hesitated, “...Which brings up something else.”

“And what would that be?” Phil asked and Wilbur noticed the doctor shift uncomfortably.

Bad stepped forward in front of his father and crossed his arms.

“Your Majesty, I’m not so sure it’s a good idea for you or the princes to be in there when Theseus wakes up,” Bad said plainly. Techno let out a sound of protest.

Wilbur wasn’t entirely sure he’d heard him right. *Tommy needs me...right?* Perhaps in truth, it was rather the opposite. But the inherently selfish part of Wilbur couldn’t give a shit.

“Why not?” Phil asked, sounding just as distressed.

“Physically, yes, Theseus is okay. But step into young Tommy’s shoes for a moment; he found out he’s been missing for eleven years and whatever life he’d been living beforehand was nothing but fabrication and not an hour later he has his wings violently torn from him before presumably being left to die. He might not be able to process all at once if his family who has been waiting for his return all this time are in the room. He needs time.” Bad explained and then added. “You can ignore this if you want, I cannot stop you. But as his doctor, I would advise against it.”

Guilt won over his vice instantly and Wilbur swallowed harshly. “He can’t be alone when he wakes up, that would just scare him more.”

“I’m not suggesting that he would be alone,” Bad defended.

“But how would...? It can’t be a stranger. And he’s known everyone in this room his whole life!” Wilbur objected and then he froze. He looked over to his father who seemed to have reached the same conclusion. There was one person. Granted they had known Theseus for less than an hour, but they knew Tommy better than they had ever gotten to know his little brother.

Phil turned. “*Ranboo*. You should be there when he wakes up.”

The prince startled slightly and then stuttered, “M-Me? But I-”

“You’re the only one here who’s known Tommy longer as Tommy rather than Theseus. He’d be comfortable with you since he knows you,” Phil explained and then paused briefly before he added, “And...you’re the only one here who knows *exactly* what Tommy is going through right now.”

Phil stepped forward to stand in front of the enderling and asked tearfully, “I know I have no right to ask this of you, given everything,...but will you watch over my son in my stead?”

Ranboo looked frozen for a long moment, stuck on what to do. And then they said, “I’m guessing I don’t have much of a choice, do I?”

Phil shook his head. “You absolutely have a choice. In fact, I’m fully expecting you to say no, and I would never blame you for it.”

The Ender Prince seemed taken aback by that. They bit their lip in contemplation for a long moment before they walked over to where they had dropped their book earlier. Ranboo knelt down and carefully gathered the handful of alliums they'd dropped and then said, "Of course, I'll watch him. He's my friend. Friends protect each other, so let me protect him."

Wilbur didn't know why, but it felt there was more to that sentence than Ranboo let on.

Phil gratefully squeezed his shoulder. "Thank you, mate. I suppose I'll never be able to repay my debt to you, will I?"

Ranboo's gaze hardened. "No. I'm afraid not." Wilbur didn't miss the bitterness in their voice. Phil nodded understandingly. Phil and Ranboo generally were on good terms but there was always an unspoken wound between them that would likely never heal. Phil had killed Ranboo's mother and that was unforgivable no matter how complex the circumstance had been.

Wilbur turned away to Quackity and then reached down to squeeze his hand. "I'll be back. Do you need to go check on Charlie?"

"Foolish and Vegetta are watching him for me. I'm all yours. I'll keep Ranboo company till you get back. And Wilbur?" Quackity broke off and squeezed his hand back. "It wasn't your fault. I don't care what anyone says or what you think. *It wasn't your fault.*"

For the hundredth time tonight, Wilbur was rendered speechless. He didn't want to tell Quackity he was wrong, he'd just end up in an argument he had very little chance of winning. Nevertheless, he was endlessly grateful, and with only one way he knew to express it. He leaned down and gently kissed his cheek just long enough to get his intention across before pulling away and following his father and brother. He didn't miss the smirk Quackity gave him.

Wilbur sucked in a nervous breath as he eyed the door Tommy rested brokenly behind. He wasn't sure what he'd see but he really hoped it wouldn't be more traumatizing than watching him nearly bleed out in Phil's arms. No, he was pretty sure *that* would be the highlight of his nightmares. Techno trailed behind Wilbur to his surprise, though thinking about it, perhaps Techno was afraid. Wilbur sure was.

Phil opened the door and Wilbur stepped inside. His eyes immediately jumped to the bed, but more importantly, the small figure curled atop it. Wilbur bit his tongue harshly to keep from crying out at the sight of Tommy. Bad had propped him up on his side, presumably to keep pressure off his back. His hair covered his eyes once again but Wilbur could still see that his mouth hung open slightly, and the sight of drool trailing down Tommy's chin was almost enough to keep him ignorant to the state of the rest of him. His shirt was off and his chest and back had been tightly bandaged with great care. He was so pale even with the I.V. in his arm giving him blood.

Tommy was too young to look so lifeless. Though death had never given two shits about age. *That*, Wilbur knew firsthand.

Wilbur nearly tripped when his brain finally caught up and he hurried to Tommy's side. He pulled up a chair and his hand instinctively came up to grab the boy's but he found himself frozen.

It wasn't that he was afraid, or maybe he was, though it wasn't of himself. It was just...in that moment. Wilbur didn't see Tommy. He saw Theseus. Just barely in the way Tommy's expression softened in his sleep, even with his extensive injuries, Wilbur could see the faintest trace of Theseus.

And then Tommy scrunched up his nose and Theseus was gone. But the bond he felt didn't strain one bit. It held steady, stronger than ever.

No, because Theseus wasn't gone at all. And neither was Tommy. It didn't matter how much Tommy remembered. It was his brother that Wilbur saw. Simple as that.

His father walked over and gently brushed Tommy's hair from his eyes and tucked it behind his ear. And then Phil grabbed Wilbur's hand that still hovered over Tommy's and closed it around the other's. He squeezed his sons' entwined hands for a moment before pulling away to grab a chair of his own and sit on the other side of the bed. Wilbur lifted the hand up for a moment, noting how cold his brother's fingers were, and pressed his face into his palm for a long moment. He whispered to him, "I'm right here, Toms. You're going to get through this. I know you will."

He pressed a gentle kiss to his knuckles as a promise before setting their hands back down on the bed.

Meanwhile, Techno stood still frozen in the doorway, even when Phil motioned him over. "C'mon, mate."

Techno shook his head, his eyes glued on Tommy. Finally, he asked, “Where is his necklace?”

Wilbur looked back at Tommy and sure enough, it was gone. Techno continued, “He had it on. Where is it? He should have it on. He should—”

Phil stopped him. “I have it.” He reached into his pocket to pull it out, letting the emerald dangle between his fingers. It had been polished and wiped clean of the blood of its owner. “He needed it off while Bad fixed him up so he gave it to me. It’s okay, I’ll give it back to him when he wakes. Now come here.”

Techno shook his head. “I can’t...I...I’m fine here.”

Phil frowned but didn’t press further. But Wilbur knew what his twin was doing. It was exactly what he’d done when they’d first found Theseus. *Exactly the same*. So he called him out on it. “He’s not going to break. He’s strong, Tech.”

Techno looked up and Wilbur saw his twin as clearly as he had when they were seven. “I know he won’t break.”

“No, you don’t. You didn’t then, you don’t know. The difference is, Mum isn’t here to tell you now so I will. He’s not fragile and today fucking proves it,” Wilbur stated, bluntly. “Now come hold his hand.”

Techno flinched at the mention of their mother but he didn’t argue. He slowly knelt next to Wilbur and let Wilbur place Tommy’s hand into his own. Techno stiffened slightly at first, his fingers shook and then Techno said softly, “I should’ve said something earlier...”

Wilbur shook his head. “He would’ve hated you for it.”

“I’d rather him hate me. I’d take him hating me over *this* every time,” Techno admitted and then pulled away, choosing to stand. Wilbur quickly took back Tommy’s hand when the boy scrunched up his face in his sleep at the loss.

“He told me something when he was still conscious,” Phil said, diverting the subject. His expression was almost haunted and grief filled his eyes. “He said he saw *her*.”

Both Wilbur and Techno tensed but Phil continued, “At first I thought it meant Kristin was coming to take him...but now I’m not so sure. He was so determined to tell me.”

“Why would Mom have been there?” Techno asked.

Phil shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe it was because of that damn vision. Remember the one I told you about, Wilbur?”

Wilbur nodded, flexing his fingers slightly at the awful memory and the argument that had started it all. “I thought that was about his kidnapping?”

“It was but at the end...it showed me a boy with his face shrouded in darkness. At first, I thought it was just prophesizing his death when he was taken. I didn’t know what to think but I was wrong. The boy had lost his wings, exactly like Tommy had. It wasn’t until I saw Tommy in the hallway that I realized it had been a warning. And that Tommy was *Theseus*.” Phil shook his head, anger simmering in his eyes. “Your mother warned me that I could change his fate but then Theseus had been kidnapped and I assumed that was what the vision was warning me of, not that Tommy’s wings would be...*Gods* he must’ve been so scared.”

“*Why was she there...*?” Techno murmured to himself. “I know you can hear me, Chat.”

Wilbur looked up at his twin who stared at Tommy, though his eyes were unfocused. He knew his Chat had been difficult lately, but he hadn’t realized that they’d shut him out entirely. Suddenly Techno’s head snapped up and he asked, “When was the last time anyone saw Crow?”

Crow? What does Crow have to do with Mum? “Not recently...” Wilbur said and then turned. “Dad?”

Phil nodded. “She was with me on the balcony when we released Theseus’ lantern, why?”

Techno's eyes widened. "She was *with you*? You didn't just bring her out there?"

Phil shook his head, confused. "No...she just flew up on my shoulder from somewhere. What is it?"

Techno laced his fingers behind his head and let out an incredulous gasp, "Holy shit."

"Despite what some may think, I can't read your mind, Tech. Now spill." Wilbur reminded him, baffled and irritated not being in the know. He had no idea what Techno was currently piecing together. Techno's eyes darted to his, his mind clearly racing and...hope in his eyes.

That's dangerous.

"Wilbur, use your head," Techno said and Wilbur scowled. "Crow *led* us to Tommy. Think about it. She took the one thing she knew we would *absolutely* go after and flew to the tower. She's the reason Tommy originally trusted us. Tommy even said he'd never seen her act friendly towards anyone other than him but she immediately warmed up to us. Crow warned us about the bandits and the moment she saw Phil she was on his shoulder. That can't be a coincidence."

Wilbur shook his head. "A coincidence of what? What the fuck are you talking about?"

Techno threw up his hands. "Primes, it was *her*. She was comforting Phil on the balcony because it was her pain too."

Her. Her pain.

Wilbur stared at him, trying to process what Techno was talking about. He'd admit Crow was far too intelligent to be a normal bird, but there was no w-

And then the pieces clicked and Wilbur's jaw dropped.

Crow was the reason they'd found Tommy. She had tugged his hair when he'd been mean to Tommy like a parent scolding their child. She was somehow sarcastic and humorous despite not being able to fucking *speak!* She was loving and protective. She had curled up to him like she'd known him for years. Crow loved them like she loved Tommy.

Oh. *Oh. Oh, my gods.* Crow was his mother.

Wilbur stared down at Tommy's hand and then to his face, pale from blood loss and oblivious to the bombshell that had just been dropped on all of them. It felt like the rug had been pulled out from beneath him. Every single ounce of resentment he'd felt towards her...His mother had never abandoned him. She was looking after Tommy. Waiting for the moment she could *finally* reunite them. She had been there the whole time. Wilbur gaped as another thing clicked and he choked, "Oh my gods, *I almost shot our mother out of the sky.*"

The noise that came out of Techno was borderline hysterical. He inhaled deeply and breathed out, "Crow is Kristin."

Phil let out a painful stifled cry and Wilbur's head shot up to his father bordering on tears. Wilbur stood to his feet but Phil raised a hand telling him stop, while the other came to cover his mouth. He tilted his head down, his hat shielding his eyes as he tried to pull himself together. His breathing was labored and panicked and Wilbur could hear the small choked cries that he couldn't quite hold back and they were *devastating*.

Finally, Phil said shakily, "She was in my office, and in a moment of grief I asked her if she was one of Kristin's birds...and she flew away. But she...It was..."

And then the door opened and Wilbur wanted to fucking scream for his father. He wanted him to have his moment to grieve and to process that not only had his son been right in front of his face but his wife too. *My mother. My mum.* His family had been whole all along and Wilbur had been none the wiser.

Any emotion on his father's face was instantly wiped away the best he possibly could. Wilbur had always wondered, ever since he was a child, how it was so easy for him to switch from being human to being an Emperor of a nation so fast. He wasn't sure he could so easily follow in such large footsteps.

Puffy and Schlatt stepped into the room and his father's demeanor collapsed instantly. He placed his head into his hands and allowed one broken sob out into the silence before sitting up. Wilbur watched as Phil gave the Chancellor a quick nod, probably to assure the ram that he was okay or at the very least *coherent*, Schlatt quickly broke the ice. "Well...you all look terrible."

Puffy elbowed him sharply and then began her report, "My guard has cleared the palace top to bottom and there's no sign of the intruders. As far as I can tell, they escaped."

Wilbur deflated at that and briefly ran his other hand comfortingly through his hair on the off chance Tommy could still hear everything that was being said to him. He doubted it, but better to be safe than sorry. Techno was the one who asked, "What about where Tommy was attacked? Phil found him in the hall but had to have Tommy come from somewhere."

The Captain nodded. "Yes, I was getting to that. We followed the trail of..." Puffy hesitated. "...that Tommy left and it led back to the Nursery. We found the key on the ground and the window had been left open in the room. The lock to the window was broken so the intruders likely came through there and surprised Tommy. Though why he was in there is beyond me."

"Tubbo told him to go in there. He gave him the key." Schlatt explained, "He wanted to prove that Tommy was Theseus and thought being in there might jog his memory...I guess it worked."

Wilbur felt his stomach curl once again. He was honestly really surprised he hadn't hurled by now.

"What we found in there..." Puffy swallowed, refusing to meet anyone's gaze. "Was more than enough to prove that's where it happened. However..."

Phil raised his head and croaked, "Continue."

"His wings were nowhere to be found. So I'm guessing that was the reason as to why they attacked him." Puffy frowned. "There was something strange... We found a pile of ashes on the floor next to the scene."

Phil's eyes widened and he gasped, "You *what*?"

Puffy nodded. "It was oddly symmetrical and frankly bizarre. I've never seen anything like it."

Phil stood from his chair and leaned back against the wall. He wasn't looking at them, rather it appeared he was deeply engulfed in his own thoughts. Finally he spoke, breathlessly, "*Kristin*. She *was* there. *That's what Tommy meant!*"

"How do you know?" Techno asked.

If his mother had been with Tommy...then why didn't she...? Maybe she got there too late. Wilbur then questioned, "Maybe she's why Tommy is still alive. I mean, why didn't the intruders kill him? And what's with the ash pile?"

Phil turned to Wilbur. "That's how she...kills. She turns people to ash if she is not meant to guide their souls. If she is meant to punish them then that's her method. She *killed* the intruder. Or at least one of them."

Ashes. Huh. Somehow he'd hoped for something a little more brutal for one of the intruders that attacked Tommy but maybe that was just him.

"There had to have been two if someone took the wings. So one of them is still out there," Techno pointed out, anger laced in his words.

And then Puffy pulled something from her pocket and held up a scrap of dark green cloth. "We did find this. It didn't match what Tommy was wearing and I've never seen it before in the Nursery."

Everyone except for Puffy froze, even Schlatt. Coldness crept through Wilbur's veins as he prayed he wasn't seeing what his brain already knew to be true. He could already feel the texture of the fabric that was forever burned into his skin like an ugly scar. His ribs ached.

The green. Dark green. A cloak that covered his face leaving only that damned mask. He would recognize that green anywhere. It had haunted his dreams every night for the past decade.

"Oh fuck..." Phil exhaled in horror while Techno growled darkly at the sight.

Wilbur simply stood there. His hand still tightly clasped around Tommy's. He could practically hear the gods laughing at them. Wilbur wanted to laugh as well, though bitterness would stain his tongue. What would a story be if everything didn't come full circle like a punch to the gut?

What is a story if not poetically ironic in the cruelest way?

Wilbur looked at Tommy, who had never done a single thing to deserve this, and damned each and every last god that was out there, save his mother.

They could all burn for their irony. They could all burn for the color green.

Chapter End Notes

Arbi while editing 27: "I am at a loss for words!"

Despite being at a loss for words Arbi yelled at me for the next forty-five minutes.

See you guys next chapter:3

If you liked this chapter, consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also, you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you like art for TGP consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on Twitter, Tumblr, Tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

Pull Me From the Earth

Chapter Notes

shoots back a shot of DayQuil and snorts two sudafeds If you don't like /r TNTduo then you won't like this chapter.

TW: None

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart <3

Word Count: 11.6k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

He wouldn't call it floating. Unless one compared the feeling of aimlessly throwing yourself off a cliff only to be held back by tendrils of ice that dug into your skin to *floating*. Her voice was the only thing that kept him from fading away into nothing as Theseus slept. The darkness was cold and painful and he wanted nothing more than his mother's embrace to warm him.

But his mother was Death, and her soothing embrace in his state would surely snuff out whatever fire remained. Instead, she sang to him endless familiar lullabies because it was the only way she could comfort her son.

Theseus opened his eyes in his limbo and slowly stood. His fingertips were blue and his teeth chattered, yet the fire still burned against his back, even though there was nothing left but smoldering embers of a lost dream. His shirt had gone and his hair hung loosely in front of his eyes, but he couldn't find the willpower to fix it.

He was so *cold*. It had never occurred to him before that someone could feel their tears freeze against their cheeks. Winters in the tower were bitter, yes, but Theseus had never been far from a fireplace.

There was no warmth to be found here, however, only a dark and endless void. No, that's not true...there was...

He turned to look at his mother who had appeared not long after he'd woken up in darkness, pulled away from his father's arms and the terrified faces of his older brothers. Kristin stared back at him

with a bittersweet expression but remained quiet, her hands were clasped together in front of her tightly. Almost as if she was restraining herself.

He staggered slightly toward her and his face crumbled like sand when she took a step back. Her voice was soft and solemn to his still ringing ears. "I'm sorry. You have to stay."

"That's my decision," Theseus argued.

"And if were anyone else it would be." His mother winced. "But it's not. It's you, Tommy. And I'm terribly selfish. I cannot let my angel bury you in the ground while your brothers weep at his feet. I couldn't bear it."

"I didn't want this," he cried and took another step towards her in the darkness. "I never asked for this."

Kristin stepped back and tears sprang up in her violet eyes that were too far away for Theseus to see. "I know, baby. I'm so sorry."

Theseus trembled and reached out to her. "Please, Mum. It *hurts*." He noticed a dim golden light in the abyss and looked down to see his own heart beating in his chest. It was cracked and battered but still beating despite the damage. His magic did nothing to fix the brokenness he felt no matter how hard he tried. He then realized, his magic wasn't doing anything at *all*. It wasn't isn't as if someone had just turned off his power. He couldn't feel it anymore. *At least, not here*. Theseus hoped. He clenched his fist tightly to his chest, against the only reminder of his worth that he had left.

"It's so cold. I just want to be held. I'm breaking apart."

Kristin shook her head. "Just a little longer, Tommy. You still have a role to play in this world."

Theseus scowled. He was about to tell her that he refused to be a pawn of someone else's confusing and twisted game when he felt a hand cup his cheek and tuck his hair behind his ears. It vanished as quickly as it had come but before Theseus could let out a gasp, a familiar warmth enclosed around his hand. He looked down and his breath hitched in surprise when he saw Wilbur standing by him.

He supposed it wasn't truly him. He stood like a statue by his side, his face shrouded by darkness and his skin translucent. Words echoed in his mind. *I'm right here, Toms. You're going to get through this. I know you will.*

"Wil..." Theseus' voice cracked. He expected the warmth to disappear and Wilbur with it but he stayed. *He stayed. He came back.* Theseus had only gotten a moment to see his brother before he'd lost consciousness. Wilbur hadn't looked at him, but just seeing him had been enough.

Enough for Theseus to go peacefully.

Another hand took Theseus'. It shook uncertainly and Theseus could feel the grief and fear within its owner just by the way it tentatively squeezed his hand. He looked up and just barely saw Technoblade for a fraction of a second before the hand let go and he disappeared. Theseus let out a panicked whimper and stumbled blindly into the void searching for his brother's touch. *Don't go. Don't leave me.*

Theseus remembered a hazy memory of Techno's agonizing expression as he'd looked down upon him in their father's arms. Wilbur's hands gently cupping his pale face as Theseus had quietly begged them to stay.

Theseus was cold, the chill had returned tenfold and he cried out for a moment before the warmth returned and he felt Wilbur's fingers entwine with his own once more. The man reappeared at his side, still motionless except for his lips moving, speaking words Theseus could not hear.

"They need you, Tommy," his mother said and Theseus looked to see her smile sadly at him. She was right. He couldn't leave. Not after everything.

Theseus looked at Wilbur for a long moment, analyzing his clouded expression. His pink roots and dark curly hair hung over his eyes and the white streak seemed to chase some of the darkness away. Looking at the streak, another foggy memory surfaced. He knew the streak meant something, he just couldn't remember what. Theseus furrowed his brow and peered slightly down. His face. How he wished he could see his brother's face rather than this hazy expression. Theseus had to know if he could still see all that he had left behind so long ago.

He wondered if Wilbur could still see Theseus in him now. What he would give to know what they thought of him. A lump settled uncomfortably tight in his throat and tears welled up once more.

He turned back to his mother but didn't dare look into her eyes. The eyes that were undoubtedly so full of the adoration and love that had been kept from him for a decade of his life. Theseus' voice wobbled unsteadily, "I'm not...I mean..." Theseus swallowed. "S-Shit... I can't..."

Theseus growled to himself in frustration, his free hand pressed against his face as he tried to string together what he wished to say. His mother was patient and Theseus wasn't sure if that made him feel any better. Finally, he met her eyes and whispered just loud enough for her to hear, "I don't know how to be what they want me to be. I'm not the same anymore. Whoever I once was...he wasn't...he *isn't* me anymore. They broke him...Unraveled his- *my* mind and strung it back together just enough that I wouldn't be some empty shell. They tangled up everything in the process. It's all still there but I'm not the Theseus they loved."

Theseus sucked in a sharp breath when he suddenly felt fingers run gently through his hair. He knew immediately they belonged to Wilbur and leaned in instinctively into the touch.

"Oh, my son..." Kristin exhaled and placed a hand over her own heart. "Don't you remember what Technoblade told you? You don't earn love. It's not a reward. Nor is it a weapon. *Love is unconditional*. It is as painful as it is beautiful. They will love whoever you decide to be, my darling. I have loved you from your first breath as Theseus and I have loved you every minute after as Tommy just as fiercely."

Theseus' shoulders hunched over slightly in grief and he mimicked his mother as he clutched at his battered heart that glowed through his ribs for all to see. He thought of Kristin as Crow, how dedicated she had been while staying with him all those years. She had been waiting for the day she could lead Wilbur and Techno to him. She had been waiting for the day Theseus finally remembered his past.

And now the wait was over. Her task had been completed but her identity had been revealed. Theseus' eyes widened as something clicked in his mind. Crow's role was finished. But...she had never come home to his family as Kristin. She hadn't been able to tell him herself who she was. She had remained Crow all those years...

"...*I would be with you always if I could. But I am trapped and you can't save me. I gave up my freedom so your father could still be with you..*" His mother's words echoed in his mind.

Despair welled in his chest.

“You’re not coming back, are you?” His voice broke.

Kristin dropped her head and her own voice was shaky as she explained solemnly, “My time is up. They know I’m Crow now. I broke the rules when you saw me in the Nursery. And even if that hadn’t happened then, it wouldn’t have been much longer. There have been too many coincidences. It was always supposed to end with me having to go. As long as you made it home...that’s all that mattered.”

Theseus shook his head fiercely. “No, no...please. Y-You can’t leave. You were all I had. All those *lonely, awful* years it was just me and you...I don’t want to lose you.”

“You never lost me, nor will you. None of you did. I’m always with you. You are my joy, *my heart* as Techno is my pride and Wilbur is my soul. When you look for me and cannot find me. Look to Techno and his ferocity and steadfastness and you will see me. Look to Wilbur in his music and wit and there I am. And when you one day smile again, my Theseus, I will be there.”

Theseus bit into his cheek, wincing at the feeling of ice trailing down his expression. “What about Phil?” *Dad.*

Kristin’s eyes were full of sadness but she smiled anyway. “Your father and I are two halves of a whole. Our whole lives have been so deeply entwined with one another that as you are my joy you are his.”

Theseus managed to stumble forward another few feet, reaching out for her again. He stretched out his hand. “Please. *Please.* Don’t leave me.”

“I *will* find my way back to you all someday,” Kristin promised. “But for now, this has to be goodbye.”

Just as she began to turn to leave, Theseus cried out, “One more hug? Please, just one more?”

“I’m sorry, Tommy. But you wouldn’t be able to let go,” Kristin said softly. And then she vanished into the abyss and Theseus was alone.

A cry stuck itself in Theseus' throat and suddenly he couldn't breathe. Crow. His constant. The one thing that had kept him sane all those years. He was losing her. He was losing his mother. Theseus heard a loud *crack* echo throughout the void.

There was a sharp pain in Theseus' chest and he fell to his knees, his hand slipped from Wilbur's, and the ice hit him like a blade. It was too much. Everything was too much. His mind was screaming, or maybe that was him. He couldn't tell anymore. He dug his hands overtop his ears and pressed his forehead against the cold dark floor. He couldn't breathe. Heartbreak wrapped around his neck like a vice and it was as if someone was choking him.

Voices in the darkness surrounded him, filling the silence till it was painful. Now instead of thinking too much, he couldn't think at all. The voices murmured incomprehensibly and for a moment Theseus found them nearly familiar. But then he felt two hands grab him by his shoulders and Theseus *lost it*. Fear spiked through him and the touch was no longer warm. *It burned*. He felt another pair of arms wrap around his waist and another press against his face.

"No, no, no!" Theseus screeched and flailed as much as he could. He had to get away from...Theseus' eyes widened and he trembled. Hands at his wings, pulling, tugging, and ripping away till there was nothing left. Cruel voices laughing at him followed by the fear Theseus had seen when the consequences of greed were made fatally clear. Death running her fingers through his hair as gently as she had in a hazy memory. He needed to go after her. Damn the pain. He couldn't lose her.

"Crow!" Theseus begged. "Mum, please! Come back! Help me!"

He felt something at his back tear suddenly and pain shot through him. They had already taken his wings, what more could they want? "Stop it! Leave me alone!"

And then he heard them. "*Theseu-kid! Stop! You're tearing your stitches!*" Technoblade yelled. The arms around his waist tightened. *No, no. They don't understand.*

"*It's okay, Tommy. You're safe here. I need you to stop!*" His father ran a thumb across his cheek. *I can't let her go. I can get her back! For all of us!*

"Blondie, c'mon. It's us!" Wilbur's hands had left his shoulder and now he could feel him holding something against his back.

Theseus was on fire again. He had to be. Every touch was like a hand against a burning stove. "It burns! Let go! It burns!" Theseus cried. "You're hurting me!"

And then Theseus felt something cold enter his bloodstream and the pain stopped. He fell back limply into Techno's arms and the darkness consumed him whole. His mother slipped away.

Tommy slept for two days after ripping out his stitches. It wasn't surprising. It was amazing he'd been able to get up at all, just hours after he'd been attacked. The kid had suddenly begun thrashing around out of nowhere, doing his damndest to crawl out of the bed and crash to the floor. It had seemed like he'd been trying to go after something with the way he'd been incoherently screaming at nothing. Ultimately, it had forced them to hold Tommy down till Bad could sedate him, which of course only terrified him even more.

Thankfully, he'd only managed to rip a couple of stitches, and it had been an easy fix. Even so, the anxiety remained steadfast in his chest, despite knowing that Tommy was going to be fine. How could it not after the way he'd screamed that they were hurting him? It had been the only comprehensible thing Wilbur had been able to make out in his panic. And so of course, it stuck with him like the plague.

Wilbur didn't sleep. He couldn't. It wasn't for a lack of trying, mind you, he just couldn't. Not with Tommy still looking so pale and broken. Things could change after all in the blink of an eye. It had happened before, no doubt it might again. The kid had already proven to be unpredictable. He couldn't afford to go to bed. Tommy might need him and he wasn't sure he'd be able to live with himself if he failed him again.

In his insomnia, he realized the castle hadn't been this quiet in many years, not since the week after Theseus was taken. The irony in that had caused a bitter laugh to tear from his throat and poison the already grim air. There were constant patrols around the castle and town that had sparked many questions as well as complaints at the apparent radio silence. The people wanted to know what was happening. Why had the kingdom shut down after the Lantern Festival? Was their Emperor ill? Was it the twin princes? What happened?

The Lantern Festival had always been a beacon meant to bring Tommy home. But after eleven years? Wilbur doubted anyone in the entire empire guessed that Theseus *actually returning* was the reason why. It wasn't as if they could tell them the truth. Tommy wasn't ready. None of them were. And the last thing Tommy needed was every eye in the kingdom upon him.

It hadn't stopped rumors, however. Wilbur had learned through Niki and others that there were whispers of a golden-haired boy seen around the castle. That he'd been seen in the streets of L'manburg, accompanied by two men with strikingly piglin features. As usual, that last bit made Wilbur clench his jaw. Even little Charlie had heard a rumor that the royal guard was on the hunt for a fugitive.

The Kingdom was searching for answers and the royal family had none to give. They were all exhausted and it was from more than just a lack of sleep. While his family managed to get little naps in here and there, Wilbur stayed wide awake, choosing instead to bury himself in his work.

A sleepy sigh interrupted his thoughts and he turned for a moment to look at Quackity from the corner of his eye. His lips twitched up to a ghost of a smile when he saw the man watching him work intently. His heart swelled with warmth.

Wilbur had to admit, he was surprised that Quackity stayed by his side throughout it all. Minus a few checks on Charlie and to shower, he remained with him.

"The kitchen will be fine without me for a few days," he had said. "This is more important."

Wilbur knew better than anyone that Quackity rarely took off from his work. Unless he or Charlie were sick, he was in the kitchen. His work was his pride and Wilbur understood that well. Not that it stopped Wilbur from trying to persuade him every chance he got to let loose and hide away from their responsibilities with him for as much time as Quackity would give him. So for Quackity to so nonchalantly dismiss the idea of going to the work? It had nearly sent his jaw crashing to the floor.

"You're exhausted," Quackity chided him in the early hours of their third day of camping out in the waiting room. The two were still sequestered to the small loveseat in the corner of the room. The maids had brought them some blankets and such to make them all more comfortable since nobody seemed willing to leave.

"M'fine," Wilbur said dismissively, flipping through some rather lengthy and far too wordy document that needed his approval. He found himself having to reread the lines over and over,

unable to grasp whatever the hell this diplomat was trying to convey to him in writing. His frustratingly smudged glasses that he couldn't be bothered to clean were starting to give him a headache from sitting on the bridge of his nose for so long. Wilbur purposefully softened his voice as he soothed, "Go back to sleep."

Quackity frowned and shifted up from where he'd had his head resting against his hand on the armrest of the couch. "You're not fuckin' fine. Your hands are shaking and you've been reading the same paragraph for about ten minutes now."

"It's a dense and complicated document. It takes me a bit to pick it apart," Wilbur argued, knowing already Quackity would call him out on the lie. As he always did.

"It's about wheat sales, dumbass. Nothing about wheat is that complicated."

Wilbur cracked a smile. "It is when you're trying to feed an entire kingdom. I'm simply making sure everyone gets a fair sha--"

"Don't change the subject," Quackity interrupted. Wilbur huffed and scrawled his signature at the bottom of the page before flipping to the next one. His cursive admittedly was less than legible.

"Wilbur--"

"I don't want to sleep. *I can't*," Wilbur admitted while gripping his pen tight.

"Because you won't even try!" Quackity accused in a hushed tone. "And don't lie to me. I see you every time you pace around the room whenever you get tired!" When Wilbur tried to brush him off and go back to his work, Quackity grabbed his wrist and snatched the pen from his hand.

Wilbur turned to snap at him but immediately bit down on his tongue before he said something he knew he'd regret the moment it slipped from his lips. He was tired and irritable, but that was his own fault, not Quackity's. Wilbur set down the paperwork and sat back, letting his head hit the soft cushion of the couch.

Wilbur frowned. “I-...” And then he covered his eyes with his hands, trying to rub away the exhaustion. After a moment he leaned up and said, “I don’t want to sleep. I’m...what if...what if I miss something? He could still take a turn. Something could happen. Someone could get in and—”

“Hey—” Quackity scooted closer to his side and grabbed one of Wilbur’s shaky hands within his own. “Not to inflate Tech’s ego—

“*Fucker*,” Techno called out instantly and they both snickered, though Wilbur’s was more muted.

Quackity rubbed his thumb meticulously over his knuckles, “-but you’ve got the legendary *Blade* and your father —*who is actually a historical legend*— watching over that little brat. Not to mention Ranboo. Tommy couldn’t have more overqualified babysitters than that. And that’s saying something considering my kid is being looked after by a jacked sage and an anthropomorphic totem of undying.”

Wilbur couldn’t stop himself from laughing this time, because in that context, it was fucking ridiculous how many bizarre people lived at the palace. Quackity’s eyes lit up at the sound. “Makes us both sound rather lame, huh?” Wilbur pointed out.

“Says you. I think I could take Techno in a fight. I’ve whacked him enough times for trailing mud into my kitchen,” Quackity joked.

“You’ve never even held a sword?” Techno sputtered, sounding rather amused from the other side of the room. “I wouldn’t bet on that fight. You might lose an eye.”

“Who said anything about a sword? I have a perfectly good cast iron to swing.”

Techno choked out a laugh that sounded rather painful. “No thanks. Q wins. I’ve had enough head trauma from kitchen cookware to last a lifetime.” Wilbur’s heart panged at that.

Quackity turned back to Wilbur and said, “See? Nothing to worry about. You should go back to your room to rest...and shower.”

“Are you saying I smell?” Wilbur gasped in mock offense.

“Among other things,” Quackity grinned mischievously and Wilbur shoved him against the couch into a pillow.

“Asshole. I literally showered this afternoon.” Which was true. Though it had been physically painful to be so far from Tommy, his father had insisted probably in the hopes he’d fall asleep afterward.

Quackity was right, unfortunately. Wilbur needed sleep desperately and he wasn’t going to be able to get any if he stayed in the Infirmary. With every hour he stayed awake, his paranoia and anxiety grew worse. His head pounded and his vision blurred every so often. He ought to head back to his quarters to sleep for the night, but the idea of walking back through that hallway that was now hopefully scrubbed clean of his brother’s blood alone was near unbearable.

He heard his twin call out and it was only then that Wilbur noticed he was curled up rather awkwardly in an armchair next to Phil. He was sitting sideways in the chair with his knees to his chest. He was using the armrest to look over training reports and new potential regulations before they began piling up. Wilbur forgot sometimes that without all his bulky gear, Techno was rather wiry. “Yes, for gods’ sake go to bed. You’re starting to look like a zombie. It’s creeping out the guards.”

“Oh, *fuck off*,” Wilbur growled and got a muted chuckle in response.

“We’ll send a guard to get you if anything changes,” Phil added from where he was also busy with piles of paperwork. The work never truly stopped for any of them. He looked up from the table and smiled weakly. “We’ll keep an eye on Tommy. Go get some rest.”

Wilbur saw something flash in Techno’s eyes before his brother suggested, “Quackity. If it’s not too much trouble can you see that he actually makes it to bed? I think he might just drop in the hallway.”

Not likely. His skin crawled at the thought but his head drooped ever so slightly.

At his side, he saw Quackity nod. “No trouble at all. C’mon, Wil.” He grabbed him by his arm and yanked him up from his seat a bit more effortlessly than Wilbur had been expecting.

“B-But...” Wilbur began. He turned his head to Tommy’s room and it felt like someone was squeezing his heart with how it ached. Ranboo was with him now, asleep at his bedside. He wasn’t sure he cou-

“Hey, don’t look at him. *Look at me,*” Quackity ordered, catching Wilbur’s attention. The shorter man had circles under his eyes nearly as dark as his own but his gaze was still intense. Quackity’s eyes softened as they met Wilbur’s. “It’s just a few hours.”

Wilbur grimaced for a moment but finally relented. He exhaled reluctantly. “Just a *few* hours.”

Quackity smiled half-heartedly. Wilbur allowed himself to be tugged out the door. He just barely heard his father call for them to be careful. It seemed Phil didn’t quite trust the safety of their home anymore. He didn’t fault him. Wilbur sure as hell didn’t. As soon as they were out of sight, Quackity broke the short-lived silence, “It’s going to be okay.”

“You don’t know that,” Wilbur immediately countered, shooting him a look. “Things could change. You don’t even know what happened.”

“No, I don’t. But believe me anyway,” Quackity said as they turned a corner. A guard shot them an odd look and eyed Quackity rather skeptically. He wasn’t sure what was going on with all these new guards but it was pissing him off. Nearly all of the older ones were familiar with Quackity and never thought to question him. Wilbur paused briefly to glare at the guard which caused them to pale and duck their head apologetically. Quackity sighed and grabbed Wilbur’s arm, pulling him along. “There’s no need for that. Let them think what they want.”

“How are you so optimistic? About Tommy that is.” A wave of intense fatigue washed over him for a split second causing Wilbur’s head to spin and he stumbled for a moment. Quackity reached out a hand but Wilbur caught himself on the wall.

The avian crossed his arms for a moment before he settled a hand on the small of Wilbur’s back to urge him forward as soon as he was steady enough. It left as quickly as it came. Wilbur shivered. Quackity sighed. “I have an eight-year-old. I *have* to be optimistic. And you need to have hope in *something*. I’m not going to watch you collapse into yourself again. You know he’s not going to die. It’s something else that’s scaring you.”

“Stop that,” Wilbur hissed. “Stop reading me. I hate when you do that.”

“*No, you don’t.* You only hate it when I’m right and you don’t want to admit it. Will you tell me what happened? I’ve heard the gist of it but there’s something that happened while you were on that roof that you haven’t spoken about. I don’t want to force you but you clearly *need* to talk about it. I can see it,” Quackity persisted. They walked side by side through the hall in silence as they made it upstairs, with Quackity having to stop every now and then to make sure Wilbur didn’t take a dive.

Wilbur deflated. He’d wanted to tell him for days now. But Wilbur knew if he tried he’d...well...he didn’t want to cry anymore. Especially not in front of everyone. He’d done enough of that. As they reached his floor he turned to Quackity and expressed, “I want to. I will tonight if you want me to. Just don’t tell me to have hope. I have it, fragile as it is. But I can’t break another promise to Tommy. *I can’t.*”

Quackity looked ashamed for a long moment and then ran the palm of his hand down his face.

“You’re exhausted and I’m...” Quackity sighed in frustration. “I’m just fucking this up. I’m not going to make you tell me. You need sleep.”

Wilbur shook his head as they rounded another corner. The guards were growing more and more frequent the closer they got and the two were whispering to each other now. “No, I want to. You’re right. *I need to.* Otherwise, it’s just gonna follow me into my sleep and my nightmares already have plenty of fuel.”

Quackity furrowed his brow, clearly mulling something over in his mind. Finally, he gave in. “Okay. But if I think it’s too much for you, I’m making you shut up.”

The urge to tease scratched at his mind and Wilbur grinned as much as he could force himself to and asked, “Oh? And how will you do that?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Quackity smirked.

Maybe it was the sleep deprivation. Maybe it was the fact that everything around him was in pieces around him and he desperately wanted to feel anything other than such profound sadness. But Wilbur was more than ready to throw caution to the wind and find out. But just as Wilbur opened his mouth to respond his eyes landed cleaning supplies tucked away poorly behind one of the banisters. He froze up, suddenly cold and he could no longer feel Quackity by his side. They were about to enter the hallway where— Wilbur sucked in a breath so sharply it made his lungs ache.

He didn't want to think about it. He'd done nothing *except* think about Tommy lying in that hallway pale as death and barely clinging to their father's coat. He wondered if they'd ever be able to get the memory of blood out of that carpet. Out of the floor, the walls, the hallway. Even if they ripped out the floors and stripped the walls...it would still be there. It would always be there, even if he couldn't see it. Not that it mattered. He could scrub at his own skin till it was raw and red and he would still feel Tommy's blood seeping into his shirt, his pants and atop his skin. It had taken him weeks to stop raking his skin raw when it was Phil who'd been lying there.

He needed to go back. He needed to check on Tommy and make sure he was still breathing.

But before he could spin around and make a run for it, Quackity grabbed his shoulder and yanked him down to his level so he could hiss in his ear. "Close your eyes. Don't think about it."

"I'm ahead—"

"Well, fuckin' *stop it*. Do you trust me?" Quackity asked and Wilbur heaved in a heavy breath. He could hear his heart pounding in his chest.

"I can't do this," Wilbur's voice shook. "He was...He was right there...right outside my door."

He had heard nothing. Neither Techno nor he had heard anything come from the Nursery. He didn't understand how it was possible that they had gotten away without a trace and the only reason Tommy was still alive was because his father fortunately decided to take a midnight stroll. They had been *so close* to losing him again. So—

Quackity stepped in front of him and jarringly tugged him forward to meet his gaze by the front of his jacket. The force of it nearly sent him toppling into the shorter man, but it successfully pulled his eyes away from the blood stain against the rug that hadn't been fully washed out yet.

“*Do you trust me?*” Quackity demanded and frustration boiled over at such a stupid question. “*Yes!*” Wilbur growled. “You know that I do.”

“Close your eyes and I’ll get you through this. Don’t look. *Don’t think*. It’s just you and me here now. We’re the only two people in the world. It’s just us,” Quackity said and Wilbur shook his head, baffled.

“What?”

“*Close them!*” Quackity demanded and finally, Wilbur relented. He squeezed his eyes shut and let Quackity grab his hands to pull him forward. His heart pounded in his chest as he took uncertain steps in the dark. He tried to focus on something else, anything else. The hands holding his own were warm and calloused from years of hard work. Wilbur knew if he looked at them he’d see various burn marks and scars accumulated over the years from cooking. They fit perfectly within his own.

“Do you remember when I snuck you out of the palace for Hallow’s Eve?” Quackity asked suddenly.

Wilbur stuttered out in confusion, “What does that have to d—”

“Do you remember?” He felt Quackity pull him forward a few more steps. Wilbur wracked his brain, hunting for the memory. It came to him easily.

They had been children then. If he remembered correctly, he and Quackity had been around the same height. Quackity was still an apprentice then, but he’d long since become invaluable to the palace kitchen. Quackity’s hair was cut short then beneath his beanie and Wilbur had allowed his to grow unruly and long. He hadn’t dyed his hair in months. It had been Wilbur’s first Hallow’s Eve without Theseus and his mother.

“Yeah, ‘course. The masks and costumes scared the shit out of me then. I’d never seen anything like them. Not to mention *you* got us lost,” Wilbur pointed out. Quackity pinched his hand. Wilbur immediately pinched back and a smile dared twitch at the corner of his mouth. He suppressed it quickly.

“Mildly turned around, excuse you,” Quackity said in defense. “I got you home didn’t I?”
“Eventually, yes,” he admitted.

“Do you know what I remember?”

“Me throwing up half the candy?” Wilbur guessed.

“Well yes that too, and it was funny as fuck. But not the point. I remember seeing you smile for the first time in months when we were out there running around the square...” Quackity trailed off a moment and Wilbur hummed in question at his silence. Quickly, Quackity coughed. “You were running around in that stupid fucking duck mask you bought. And I couldn’t even retaliate because you would’ve gotten mad,” Quackity said and Wilbur already knew without looking that he was rolling his eyes.

Wilbur chuckled, “Yeah that was a bit hypocritical on my end. Sorry.”

Quackity sighed, silent for a moment and clearly in thought. And after a moment he linked their fingers together and Wilbur blushed furiously until Quackity said quietly, “It made all the trouble I thought I would get into worth it.”

Wilbur frowned and reluctantly recalled the memory of Schlatt holding him roughly under one of his arms as he dragged the two boys to Phil after they’d been immediately caught by the guards upon arriving home. He had angrily scolded the two on the way and it was only when Schlatt turned to see a glimpse of genuine terror in his eyes that he’d let him go...but not Quackity. Techno had peeked out from his room and tried to intervene but to no avail. Phil had been livid, though nowadays he understood why. He had been terrified. “Yeah, that was less fun. I’ve never seen Dad that angry with me.”

It had been the scolding of a lifetime and yet all Wilbur could remember was trying to keep his father’s anger focused on him and not the kitchen boy who he’d immediately pushed behind him, much like he’d done with Tommy when they’d been ambushed. Years later he’d learned that Phil never would’ve thrown Quackity out, he’d just been scared for *both* of them. If Wilbur had been recognized and taken, there was almost no doubt that Quackity would’ve been killed. It had been a bad night for all of them, full of regrets and harsh words none of them had been able to take back for a long time.

Wilbur was really starting to wonder why of *all memories*, Quackity had surfaced this one.

“It was my idea and my fault but you shoved me behind you to protect me and lied.” Quackity was quiet for a moment. “I spent years wondering and asking myself why you’d done that. You were grounded for *months* and I got off with practically a slap on the wrist. And yet you’d seemed almost *happy* about it.”

“Of course, I lied. I’m a prince. It means nothing if I’m in trouble. But you—” Wilbur, his eyes still shut, heard what sounded like a door opening and suddenly he was being yanked forward.

Then Quackity's hands were gone from his own, and the sudden shift in balance sent Wilbur tumbling to the ground over his lanky limbs. He opened his eyes to complain, ego and body bruised, when he recognized the familiar walls of his room, and Quackity shutting the door.

Quackity leaned against it and grinned triumphantly, “*Ta-da,*” He said casually as if Wilbur wasn’t just about to pour his heart out over a decade-old incident or that he’d just been chucked to the ground effortlessly. Quackity leaned over cheekily to say, “Told you I get you here, didn’t I?”

Wilbur climbed to his feet and feigned annoyance. “You tricked me!”

“*Distracted,*” Quackity corrected. “I’d argue that makes it distinctly different.” *Cocky bastard.*

Without thinking, Wilbur walked over to Quackity and leaned in, bracing his hand against the door right next to Quackity's head, effectively caging him in. Quackity’s face burned red as he was crowded against the door and his wings flattened behind him. Wilbur looked down at him for a moment and only then realized that he was *way too close*. But instead of acknowledging it, he continued from where he had been so rudely interrupted. “We were kids. I was too young to realize I’d nothing to fear from Dad and Schlatt. But at the time, I was scared. Dad was so lost after losing Mum and he wasn’t the same for a while. I didn’t know anymore how he might react. It could’ve been real bad if you’d gotten in trouble for taking me outside. You could’ve lost your position. Phil might not have taken it but someone would’ve. I couldn’t... I mean...

“Hey, it’s okay. I shouldn’t have brought it up... I didn’t realize it had upset you that much. I just needed to distract you and that was the first thing I thought of,” Quackity explained, his brows knit in concern. Wilbur met his gaze and found safety in his brown eyes. “Like you said, *we were kids*. It was a long time ago. All’s well that ends well and whatever, right?”

“Right,” Wilbur said softly. He let the conversation trail but didn’t look away like he should’ve. He probably shouldn’t be leaning over him like this either. It didn’t help that Quackity didn’t move either, despite being easily able to slide away from the door. “I think it turned out all right, for the most part. We grew up and stayed friends. You stayed.”

Quackity snorted. “As if there was anywhere else I wanted to be. I have a home, a job I love, friends—family if I’m being honest. I have Charlie and...I have you. It’s enough.”

“Just barely though right?” Wilbur teased, his face warm. Quackity rolled his eyes and crossed his arms casually as Wilbur continued. “When we were kids you said you’d make your way in this world. I always thought then you’d be long gone by now.”

Quackity hesitated a moment and then gave a small smile. He wasn’t looking at his eyes anymore. “Guess I found something worth staying for.”

He was toeing the line. They both were. That damned wretched line they both constantly danced around. Because if either crossed it, there was no going back. If it were someone else, Wilbur would’ve just bit the bullet years ago and run over the line without so much as a second glance.

But it wasn’t. It was Quackity. His first friend. His best friend of *seventeen years*. So as much as everyone teased them, it wasn’t that simple. It wasn’t until five years ago, at a ball he’d somehow wrangled Quackity into actually attending that he realized he was completely and utterly *screwed*. And then Quackity began dating Karl and Sapnap and Wilbur decided his friendship with Quackity was more important than whatever dumb feelings he had. Ironically, it had been Techno who had told him he’d regret letting him go.

“I may not be one for romance— too clingy and emotional for me, but I remember enough of our parent’s marriage to know how important it is that I tell you; do not miss your opportunity. If you like him, then stop being an idiot and tell him,” Techno had said one night while Wilbur had been melodramatically playing his guitar in his twin’s room.

But to Wilbur it was too late. He’d already drawn the line himself. Sure it was like someone stepping on his heart, but he’d gotten over it.

And then Quackity had his heart absolutely shattered to bits by Karl and Sapnap who left him when Quackity had chose not to quit his job and leave everything he’d ever known to travel with them on and off. Wilbur stayed far far away from the line because Quackity needed a friend and nothing

more. And it was enough. It wasn't till two years ago that he first noticed something was different about their friendship.

Wilbur had gravitated around Quackity for years, but one day he noticed Quackity doing the same. He'd catch him staring at him and blush when Wilbur stared back. Wilbur had always been flirty with him, and he assumed Quackity just chalked it off as his personality, but then Quackity began to flirt *back*. Before, Quackity had never been one for physical affection, something that was borderline torturous for Wilbur even as friends. And then suddenly one day it started, and at first it was just little things; the "accidental" brush of their hands in passing, a hand against his shoulder in confidence, casually leaning against the other in comfortable silence.

And it grew from there. *And it didn't stop.* It *still* hadn't.

They both finally stood at the line Wilbur had drawn. It had blurred after so many years but it was still there, waiting for one to cross it and see whether or not they'd crash and burn and send seventeen years of friendship down the drain. It had happened with Sapnap after all.

Wilbur couldn't risk that. And it seemed neither would Quackity. They were too scared to lose one another.

"Do you still want to talk? About what happened?" Quackity backed away from the line. Wilbur sighed.

"I'm not even sure if it's sunk in yet. I keep waiting to wake up and have this all be some fucked nightmare. But it isn't. It's real. Tommy's *real*. *And he's—*" Wilbur choked on his words and finally backed away from Quackity. He stumbled aimlessly around the room for a moment, unsure of where to go or what to do. It seemed no matter how much he tried to distract himself he always ended up right back where he started. That damned hallway. Chaos, as his father called him, grinning beneath his mask as he ripped away at Theseus till he was moments away from finding himself in their mother's arms.

He found himself leaning back against his bed. He dug his fingers into the familiar texture of his comforter. It did little to cull the erratic thoughts of his own mind, half of which he wasn't sure came from him. "I left him. It's my fault. I left him on that roof. I knew who he was and I *left*."

Wilbur sucked in a shaky breath as he tried to swallow back his grief before it could overwhelm him again. He felt hesitant hands brush back his unruly hair. He took another deep breath as he

focused himself to present, relying solely on the feeling of Quackity's fingers running through his hair. It was an inconvenient angle given that Quackity was maybe a head shorter than him. So after a moment, his hands pulled away and he felt Quackity hop up on the edge of the bed. He felt Quackity's chin on his shoulder while his arm wrapped around his front, pulling him into a half-hug as best he could. It was still a somewhat awkward position, but since when had they ever been anything but?



Quackity murmured gently to him, “You were scared. No doubt all of you were scared shitless. You’re not perfect, Wil. You never could’ve predicted he’d be hurt. I know you. If you had known, you would’ve fought like hell to protect Tommy. You’ve *always* protected him, even now. When you brought him into the palace I could feel it immediately. You would never intentionally put him in danger like that. You’re not a failure.”

Wilbur choked on his words, his breath hitching high in his throat. He pulled away for a moment, leaving Quackity a bit startled for maybe a second before he stepped between his legs and collapsed against his chest. Quackity immediately pulled him into his arms. Given the height of the bed, he was easily able to press his face into Wilbur’s hair and gently run his fingers through his curls and the back of his neck.

Wilbur finally broke, his voice shook as he grieved.

“I got him back. He came *back*. And the moment I figured it out, I jerked away from him. He’d been so happy. Happier than I’d ever seen him and I *ruined* it. I fought with Techno in front of him and then *left*. He’d been so scared. He thought I was gonna leave him and I was too much of a coward to say otherwise.”

Quackity didn’t speak, instead allowing him to get it all out into the air while comforting him the best he could.

“Eleven years. I thought he was dead, but even then I told myself if one day he somehow miraculously came home that I’d...that I’d do better. I’d be *better*. I’d keep him safe and yet the *first* thing I do after getting him back was hurt him. My mother gave me back Theseus and I *hurt* him,” Wilbur sobbed. “I let him get attacked by the same bastard who took him the first time. Probably the same bastard who’d abused him all those years. Who hurt him so bad Tommy couldn’t even look at himself in the mirror without fearing Dream would be there.”

“I failed him,” Wilbur whispered just loud enough for Quackity to hear. And yet Quackity shook his head and instead pulled his face out of his chest so they were eye to eye.

Wilbur didn’t think he’d ever seen Quackity look so serious as he told him, “You fucked up, yeah, but that is not the same as failing him. You made a *mistake*. You get to make those. You have done nothing but love that kid from the moment you brought him here. I would give anything to be able to make you smile the way Tommy does. That day during the festival, Tommy was the happiest kid in the world. I have never seen you smile on Theseus’ birthday. I’ve never seen Techno smile,

period, or at least not in *many* years. If you failed Tommy then I have failed Charlie a million times over.”

Wilbur tried to look away but Quackity held him firm. Wilbur’s voice cracked, “He lost his wings because I left.”

Quackity shook his head. “No. He lost his wings because someone awful ripped them out. It’s not your fault. It’s no one’s fault. And when Tommy wakes up, you can tell him that too. Because he’s going to blame himself. I may not know Tommy, but I know self-loathing when I see it. I guess it runs in the family. Tommy *hates* himself and he’s about to have his whole world flipped on its head. Your job now as his brother, as someone who *loves* him, whether Theseus or Tommy, is to make him feel wanted. To let him know that he is enough exactly as he is.”

With that, Quackity let him go but Wilbur stayed planted right where he was. He stared at him, stunned. What had he done right to deserve him? Probably nothing. For once in his life, perhaps luck had just decided to favor him. But he was right. Damn him, he was always right. Wilbur needed to pull it together and be there because Tommy *needed* him. And...*shit*..the thought of it made his head spin, but even though he hadn’t voiced it or even entertained the idea, Quackity was right. He loved Tommy. He loved him just as he loved Theseus.

How Quackity knew that, he had no idea. But he was grateful for the reminder. He was grateful for him. And he’d never wanted to leap over that line more than he did now. Wilbur’s eyes were teary as he reached up hesitantly to hold Quackity’s face in his hands the same way Quackity had done not minutes earlier. The avian quirked an eyebrow in confusion but leaned into the touch anyway. Wilbur gently traced the line of his jaw as he swallowed his courage and asked, “Can I kiss you?”

Quackity’s eyes went wide for a long moment and Wilbur saw a thousand different emotions pass through him before finally he settled on one that perplexed him. Quackity gave him a small smile, his face flushed red, and then finally leaned in slightly to say, “Yes.”

Wilbur’s stomach flipped. He hadn’t expected that. It was stupid that he hadn’t but it was even more stupid that he’d asked. But he was a lovesick idiot and Quackity had said *yes*. Quackity had said yes and he hadn’t moved an inch. All his anxiety over the possibility of ruining whatever *this* was teetered on the edge of overflow. He wasn’t ready, but he leaned in anyway.

And then just before their lips met, Quackity placed a hand over Wilbur’s mouth. He stilled, startled, and then in an instant he was absolutely terrified that he had just destroyed everything. He looked up at Quackity bracing for rejection, but all he saw in that moment was slight guilt and such

adoration he could've melted on the spot. Wilbur let out a noise of confusion and pulled away from his hand, frowning.

Quackity breathed out apologetically, "Just *not tonight*. You're exhausted in probably every way possible. You need rest and *time*. Time to heal. You're not ready."

Wilbur groaned, in truth somewhat relieved, and leaned into his shoulder, face burning with embarrassment. "That was mean, Q." He was right though. That wasn't how he wanted it to go. Not with everything going on around him souring the moment and frying his mind.

Quackity laughed against his neck and his hand came up to gently hold the back of his head. "Sorry. That was a little mean, but necessary. It was kind of funny though."

Wilbur shoved him back, letting him fall back into the sheets with a yelp. "I hate you," he said through embarrassed laughter, his face was probably scarlet and he could tell Quackity was enjoying every moment of it. "Literally the worst."

Quackity sat up on his hands, quickly taking off his shoes so they weren't on the bed. "You're face says otherwise, *guapo*."

The endearment only made his face flush more until finally, he flung off his shoes and buried his face into one of his pillows so Quackity couldn't tease him anymore. "I'm gonna die sad and alone. Techno was right," Wilbur said overdramatically and Quackity snorted. Wilbur felt the bed dip next to him.

"A damn shame. I kind of liked you," Quackity said, patting his back in sympathy.

"Kind of?!" Wilbur shot up looking cross and Quackity leaned his face into another pillow laughing. Wilbur smacked him with another pillow because gods knew he had way too many of them. "Asshole."

Eventually, Quackity grabbed the pillow from Wilbur and chucked it somewhere. "Oh, stop pouting. It wasn't for a lack of want. You know I'm right."

“I hate it when you’re right. You’re so insufferable when your right. Drives me crazy.”

“It seems I drive you crazy regardless,” Quackity grinned.

“Don’t I fuckin’ know it,” Wilbur said, then yawned. Quackity sat up almost as if he was about to get out of bed. Wilbur panicked and grabbed his arm. He could *not* be on this side of the palace alone. “Don’t go. Please. I- I...It’s stupid but I-”

“Relax. I’m just getting blankets for the couch. I’m not going anywhere.”

“The couch?” Wilbur asked.

“Unless you want me to freeze tonight?” Quackity raised a brow, though Wilbur could see his ears were red.

Wilbur rolled his eyes and laughed. “Shut the fuck up and get your ass in this bed. You’ve never been chivalrous before I’m not letting you start now.”

Quackity squeaked at that and Wilbur snickered, which earned him a floor pillow to the face. But regardless he listened and a moment later he felt Quackity at his side. The exhaustion seemed to multiply tenfold the moment he got comfortable and suddenly he was too tired to care as he rested his head against Quackity’s shoulder and slung an arm around his waist.

To his credit, Quackity froze for maybe a second before he had a hand running through his hair. If Quackity said anything before they fell asleep, he didn’t hear it as he finally found the peace he’d been searching for.

Quackity looked down when he noticed Wilbur’s breathing had evened out and his expressions had finally softened. His heart swelled as he curled up more comfortably to him. He pressed a kiss to the top of his head and whispered to the sleeping man, “*Que duermas bien, mi amor.*”

“What are you thinking?” Phil’s voice stirred Technoblade from his thoughts. He blinked blearily, his eyes struggling to stay open.

“Whatd'ya mean?” Techno replied, his words slightly slurred by his own exhaustion.

Phil shifted up in his chair, discarding his paperwork on the coffee table in front of them. “You’ve hardly taken your eyes off that door since he got hurt. You only stop when you sleep and even then you only allow yourself a few hours rest. What are you thinking about right now?”

“I’m thinkin’ my back is gonna be screwed up for a week from sitting like this for so long.” He was still in that same odd position he’d been in when Wilbur and Quackity had left. He felt his back crack and hummed at the relief as he stretched out the rest of his half-asleep limbs.

“Technoblade,” Phil said pointedly and Techno’s ears flattened in the way they only did around Wilbur and Phil. He quickly cast his eyes to the ground.

“It doesn’t matter. Wilbur made me promise I wouldn’t act on it.” The lie was heavy on his tongue.

Phil’s eyes widened, understanding quickly what the piglin meant. “Vengeance isn’t the answer, Techno.”

Techno laughed bitterly. “Says the angel who slaughtered my entire village for letting two children starve to death.”

Phil frowned. “What I did wasn’t right. I’ve told you that before.”

“And I told you that I wished you hadn’t killed them. I wish you had waited. Because *I* wanted to be the one to end them. To cut them down till they lay dead at my feet. I wanted revenge for Wilbur and me. And now I want vengeance for Tommy. Don’t tell me you don’t want to see that green bastard burn,” Techno seethed.

“You know that I do.” Phil’s voice was dark with anger.

“Then tell me this... If you had a chance to do it over, would you still have destroyed my village?” Techno asked already knowing the answer.

Phil clenched his jaw tight. “Techno, *please*. Don’t do this.”

“Answer the question,” Techno hissed.

“*In a heartbeat*,” Phil admitted and then grabbed his shoulder. “But don’t mistake my arrogance as an excuse. In case you forgot, *he killed me*. I slaughtered every warrior in that village even with their years of experience, but the man who took Theseus still killed me. Do not underestimate him.”

“I have never underestimated anyone. And I won’t start with him. I’ve spent every day from the moment we lost Tommy learning how to be just enough of a monster that I’d be able to kill the one that hurt us.”

“You are *not* a monster, Techno,” Phil growled.

“The Blood God disagrees,” Techno countered and Phil paled at the name. Techno felt his father’s nails dig into his shirt anxiously but he continued on anyway. “He thinks I could be. He even thinks Wilbur could be. Not that I’d ever let that happen despite what I said to him earlier. He told me could make me strong enough to kill even the god of Chaos himself.”

“You know better than to believe the things he whispers to you from his cage.” Phil looked horrified. Techno flinched away. “Techno. That green bastard *is* Chaos. That’s how he was able to kill me. I wasn’t even able to move when I was stabbed. The moment Theseus came up to me in the hall and the vision began to come true was the moment I lost all autonomy. It was *Chaos*. Do not doubt your mother’s words, my son. You are not a monster. You are not the Blood God’s puppet. Your soul isn’t bound by chains of blood. He does not control you,” Phil said, his eyes desperate and pleading.

“Doesn’t he? I remember when he grabbed me. It’s hazy but he tried to rip me away from Wilbur. We were dead but we were together and then it grabbed me. And it was brief but for a split second...it grabbed Wilbur too. Mom pulled us back but the Blood God had already done his job. When Chat woke it was thousands of voices in my head calling me a monster. Praising the Blood God and begging me to lash out at the first thing I saw. And that ended up being Wilbur.” Techno’s

voice was rough. He no longer bothered to keep it steady and low. His voice cracked emotionally, his pitch wobbled up and down, and he stumbled uncharacteristically over his words while he spilled to his father something he'd kept buried for nearly twenty years. It may have been the most honest and vulnerable Techno had ever been in his life.

"But you *learned*. And so did Chat. You changed Chat for the better. You found a way to balance their need for bloodlust and your own will. You never let them gain control, even as a child. You overcame all of that so much faster than anyone expected. You've never been a threat to any of us, Techno. There's no one I'd trust more with my life, with Tommy's life and your brother's."

Techno swallowed thickly. "Yes but maybe...I mean Chat's purpose was to get me to accept the Blood God's offer. They were supposed to drive me out, either drive me to insanity or smother me all together. But they *didn't*. They felt bad about Wilbur. They didn't want to hurt me. They care about me and they stopped fighting for control because they care about our family. And then Tommy got hurt...and they...they're *furious*, they want Chaos *dead*. They will stop at nothing till they see him dead at my feet. *And I agree with them*. The Blood God's power will give me the strength I need to keep you safe."

Phil's gaze darkened. "Am I not the Angel that destroyed him?" His voice was stern, angry even. He didn't sound like the man who had raised him. He sounded like the Emperor people feared. The Angel of Death. "Did I not send him hurtling down to Hell? Do not have faith in the Blood God. Have faith in *me*. I will not let Chaos' deed go unpunished. I'm not letting him go, Techno. I'm just choosing Theseus first. Chaos *will* kill you."

Techno's eyes went wide and for a long moment and for a moment he wondered if his father was right. He knew ultimately that he was. It was entirely possible, even likely that Chaos would kill him and he doubted his mother would be able to hold onto his soul again. But then he thought about Tommy. Seeing him lying near lifeless in Phil's arms had been enough to entertain the thought, but then learning Tommy had nearly been killed by the same bastard that took him...had been enough to set him on the path. He had to try. He couldn't let Tommy get hurt again.

And if Chaos was who Techno predicted he might be...if he was... A growl rumbled in his throat. His mother had done half the job by killing one of them, so now it was up to him to finish the job.

He felt hands grab his shoulders roughly and he snapped his head up to meet his father's eyes. Philza begged him, "*Technoblade!* Don't do this. Don't choose this path. We can't lose you. *I can't lose you*. Losing Tommy and your mother...destroyed us for a long time. Losing *you*..."

Phil was quiet for a long time, his breath caught in his throat trying to keep himself together. His hands trailed up until Techno felt loose strands of his unruly hair being tucked behind his ear. Phil held him like he was something precious because he *was*. He and his brothers were the most precious gift of them all. He knew it because his father never failed to let them know that they were *loved*. Finally, Phil spoke, his voice barely put together, “I don’t think I could bear going through it all again...Tommy is so fragile right now, he needs all of us. And Wilbur...*gods*...”

Wilbur. In all of his brooding and plotting...he hadn’t thought about...

Something cold gripped his heart. A part of Wilbur had died when Theseus was taken and their mother had disappeared, but Techno was quite literally his other half. And Tommy...he promised Tommy he’d come back. He wasn’t sure how much his little brother remembered of him...but he’d take anything even if nothing at all. He knew he was Theseus, that’s all that mattered. But right now? Tommy would soon be reeling by both the loss of his wings and the loss from a lifetime of lies. His entire revenge plot was meant to keep his family safe, but what was the point if he ended up failing? He would end up being the one to destroy his own family.

“*Dammit,*” Techno gritted. He hated this. He hated all of it. He’d spent his whole life training to be a warrior but he couldn’t even protect his own family. Techno let his shoulders slump and leaned his forehead against his father’s shoulder much like he used to do as a child. Phil held him fiercely as if he feared to lose him if he let go. “M’sorry. I’m just...so angry *and...and...*” Techno swallowed. “I’m *scared*.”

Everyone was afraid of something, but Technoblade was kind of *known* for being fearless, at least to the public. Of course, it wasn’t true and it definitely wasn’t true now. He knew fear but hadn’t known fear like this in a long time.

It was palpable on his skin, his hands shook and his heart still felt like it was racing. And it wasn’t just him. Chat was terrified. It seemed they’d finally run out of secrets to keep from him. They no longer knew what came next but thankfully they recognized Techno’s anger towards them and kept quiet for the most part. It didn’t stop Techno from feeling every single wave of terror that tore through Chat. As much as he wanted to comfort them, he wanted them to know how it felt to be cut off. It was pure stubbornness that was only ultimately hurting Techno but he didn’t care. He wasn’t bending.

They’d known about Tommy *and his mom*. *Fuck them*.

He felt Phil's hand come to hold the back of his head. "It's okay. You're allowed to be afraid. *I'm afraid*. Just don't let it control you. Tommy's home, he's with us, he's sa-

"Don't you dare say 'safe'!" Techno snapped, jerking from his grasp. After a long moment of tense silence, he ducked his head in shame at the startled look on his father's face. His voice broke, "He wasn't safe. I told him he was. I promised him. And I was *wrong*. He won't *ever* be safe till--"

"I know," Phil pulled back and buried his face in his hands. "*I know*. Gods, eleven years and I still don't know how to do this right without her."

Techno's eyes softened but his chest felt tight. His mother had been with him all along. She'd been there that night when he'd held Tommy in his arms and sung to him under the stars to chase away bad dreams. When the mineshaft had collapsed she had been who he'd clutched tightly to his chest as he'd ran faster than he ever had in his life, praying to his mother that he'd be able to reach his brothers in time. The irony slowly eroded his heart. If this was all some sick joke by the gods then he'd stop at nothing till he found a way to make them bleed gold.

They'd all been so astonishingly blind to the truth and it had cost Tommy dearly. And now Crow was nowhere to be found.

"Crow isn't coming back, is she?" Techno asked and Phil shook his head. Techno swallowed his grief.

"No. No, I don't think she is. As if Tommy didn't have enough to mourn," Phil said into his hands. "I'm so sorry, Techno. I tried so hard to defy that damned prophecy and save your brother. We both did. Your mother and I. We just wanted to give you that life I promised you when I found you..."

"You did the best you could. And it was enough," Techno whispered. "It was more than enough. Thank you."

Phil's shoulders shook silently at that.

Techno dropped his head and then frowned. "You did defy it though."

“Huh?”

“Tommy was supposed to die,” Techno explained, the words nearly making him flinch. “He was supposed to bleed out in that hallway, but he didn’t. So maybe we ended up doing something right after all.”

Phil shook his head. “It was your mother who saved him.”

“True. But she saved him from the Nursery. You saved him. If you hadn’t been out there...” Techno sucked in a breath. “Gods...”

Phil was still, clearly deep in thought. Techno asked him, “So what was different?”

Phil’s eyes widened and fresh tears spilled down over his cheeks. He turned to Techno and smiled. “You. *You and Wilbur.*”

Techno froze at that and quickly shook his head confused. He refused to even entertain the idea. And yet Phil continued, “In the original vision, I was alone. No one came when I called. And back then, I didn’t even know your names nor did I know Schlatt or anyone. It was just Kristin and I. But this time, I knew who to yell for and you were there. Wilbur was able to get me to focus on how to save him and *you*, Techno you ran like hell to get him here.”

Phil gently took hold of Techno’s shaky hands and squeezed them tight. “Techno. You and Wilbur...you saved him. You both prevented his fate. *You* are what saved Theseus.”

Techno stared blankly into Phil and ultimately decided he couldn’t handle that response. So instead he asked, “Can we just say it was a group effort? I’m so sick of trying not to cry actually. It’s exhausting and it’s really ruining my image.”

Phil let out a surprised laugh that bordered on hysteria. He still had tears streaming down his face but Techno still found himself letting out a low chuckle and small smile of his own.

“Sure, Tech. We can say that.” Phil nodded. “We can say whatever you want.” Techno finally squeezed his hand back and for the first time in days, he felt a bit better.

And then the door to the Infirmary opened and Ranboo stumbled out, their hair mussed and new burn marks trailing down their cheeks. They were bordering on hysteric. They caught themselves on the door and in a sporadic jumble of Ender, German and English yelled at the two. Techno caught none of it.

“Woah, easy kid. Slow down, say it again,” Techno said, calming the teen. Anxiety bubbled in his chest for a terrifying moment at what he prayed wasn’t bad news.

“He woke up.” Ranboo tearfully smiled and paused a moment to wipe his eyes before they could burn themselves even more. Ranboo sighed in relief and grinned as they repeated, *“Tommy woke up.”*

Chapter End Notes

pff and yall thought I'd really make them kiss. cmon we've still got some ground left to cover;)

oh hey look! tommy's awake. im sure nothing emotional will happen next chapter at all.

Edit: NOW FEATURING FANART BY @cookiejugz

<https://twitter.com/cookiejugz/status/1745701217869730196>

I'll see you lovelies in the next chapter<3

If you liked this chapter, consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also, you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you like art for TGP consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on Twitter, Tumblr, Tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

And When You See What I've Become

Chapter Notes

hello. i am very sleep. 29 was split into two parts for yall ADHD bitches/pos and hopefully 30 will be out next week. Till then, have fun with this chapter;3

TW: PTSD, Panic Attacks, Blood (in art)

Word Count: 6.8k

This chapter was beta-read by the lovely @arbitersart <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Pointed nails gently traced the lines of his palm. It's methodical and absentminded, but comforting as it pulled Tommy back from the abyss. Soft cotton was pressed against his cheek and a cool rag rested atop his forehead. This time he felt like he was floating, unlike the unforgiving chill of Limbo. Warmth seeped through his veins dulling everything including his murky thoughts.

Am I home? He wondered. Had he perhaps grown sick after the festival? Maybe all those treats had been a mistake. A terribly delicious mistake. One he would most certainly repeat given the chance. Tommy vaguely recalled the warmth of Techno's arms as he was carried somewhere far from the rooftop. Presumably to bed? A warm bed and a soothing hand through his hair seemed a wonderful way to end the best day of his life. Techno had held him so tight, with more care and love than he'd ever dared hope to receive from Dream. The older man had tucked his head under his chin and hugged him close as if he was trying to hold him together. Tommy's brow knitted together as something itched at his mind.

There was something else... Techno had been crying, quiet and soft tears that had fallen against his bloodstained cheeks. Technoblade never cried. He'd only known Techno less than a week but he knew it was true... somehow. But Techno had been crying and Tommy had screamed, awful and ugly. The world lost its rosy hue and had been painted dark as greed and arrogance tore out his worth. The world was slowly fading away and his brother begged for him to hold on.

The world faded away and his mother with it.

A child stood by his side, clinging to his leg, his hair golden and his smile bright as the sun.

Tommy knelt down at his side and let the child see all that he had become.

“You look tired,” Theseus noted, holding his face with his tiny hands.

Tommy nodded again. “I am tired.”



“That’s okay. I think we’ve earned the right to be a little tired.” Theseus wrapped his arms around his neck and hugged him tight. Tommy melted instantly and chuckled tearfully into his shoulder.

“Yeah. Yeah, I think we have.”

Tommy opened his eyes.

He half expected to be blinded by light when he opened them, but he was surprised to find the room just dim enough that it wasn’t strenuous. Tommy wondered if it was because it was raining. He liked the rain.

It was rather ironic, to enjoy something people in books found dreary and cold. Though gods knew he would gladly rip out irony’s tongue if it meant it never spat misfortune upon him again.

The world blurred for a moment as he slowly focused on dragging himself out of his slumber. The first thing he noticed when the world faded in again was that the pointed nail no longer traced gentle circles into his palm. Tommy looked up when the sound of someone sucking in a sharp breath startled him. He finally chased the dizziness from his vision and saw Ranboo staring back at him. Ranboo, who looked rather stunned to see him.

Ranboo, who normally looked so put together and proper. Yet now their clothes were wrinkled and disheveled. Their hair was tied up messily and they looked worn to the bone. But most concerning of all...they looked so incredibly *sad*.

Tommy’s eyes trailed down and instantly his hazy memory sputtered to life when he spotted the worn blue scarf around their neck. And for the first time, he recognized it.

“Y-You kept it...” Tommy whispered incredulously, his voice cracked from the dormancy of sleep. All these years Ranboo had kept the cloak he’d given him for the cold. And when they’d grown too big they’d turned it into a scarf.

“Tommy...” they whispered, still recovering from the shock. “You’re awake...” The hand entwined around his and squeezed.

“D-Don’t look a-all sur...prised an... shit about it,” Tommy croaked, his voice sounding creaky from what he surmised to be from disuse.

They frantically shook their head and Tommy smiled faintly at his friend’s frazzled nature. “N-No! It’s just...well I’m just *really* glad to see you awake.”

“Aww. M-Miss me?” He tilted his head.

Ranboo gave him a fragile smile and said quietly, “More than you know.”

I fuckin’ wish I didn’t.

“Try me,” Tommy countered and Ranboo’s eyes widened.

“Wait...you just said—“ Ranboo looked down at their scarf and then let out a sound of pure awe. “So it’s true. You remember.”

Tommy jerked his head to nod and bit his lip, unsure of how to answer. Because in truth he wasn’t sure if he really did. How much of his memory was actually intact? Which parts were real? Which parts were fabrications made by George and Dre-

Tommy swallowed hard, throat welling up with emotion. He looked around. They were in an isolated room with a bed, a counter, and a few chairs. It wasn’t cozy. If anything it was almost sterile...and cold.

“Where are we?” Tommy rasped, sounding shaky.

“The Infirmary,” Ranboo replied almost reluctantly. They seemed perplexed by Tommy’s lack of response to the obvious elephant in the room.

Award for world’s vaguest answer goes to...

Tommy furrowed his brow. "...Why?" He tried to wrack his brain but all he let himself see was Techno. Techno carrying him through horrors and telling Tommy or perhaps himself that he wasn't gonna let him—Tommy hit a wall and all he remembered was static. Static and horror and something Tommy knew he really didn't want to recall. It was right there though. All Tommy needed to do was prod once and he'd know.

The Ender Prince froze, almost as if they were terrified. They swallowed and pulled away briefly to flutter their hands together nervously. Ranboo finally exhaled slowly and then asked, "Tommy... what's the last thing you remember?"

No. Don't ask me that. Please don't. Tommy shakily looked to Ranboo and sucked in a breath when he felt Ranboo's hand return instantly to squeeze his comfortingly. Tommy relented against the metaphorical wall that threatened to crumble like sand at his feet. Tommy kicked it down.

The last thing I remember...was my own hell.

He didn't even have a chance to brace himself as it flooded back. The lullaby Wilbur sung to mourn him. The argument on the roof that followed between the twins. Wilbur staring down at him with eleven years worth of grief in his eyes before...leaving him; followed by Techno promising him he'd come back. And Tubbo frantically hunting him down in the hallway to tell him a lie, only to discover in the Nursery that he'd been telling the truth. And then...*Dream*.

Crow. His mother. His mother killed George. And he...

"...Oh." Tommy gasped, quiet and pained. "Right."

It was just like he'd predicted in Limbo. His memory was scattered as if someone had taken a hammer to it. Nothing was in place anymore, perhaps not even recent memories. And yet there was still something left...something he hadn't quite pieced together...

He turned and immediately hissed as pain shot through him, though it was considerably dulled from what he presumed to be some kind of pain medication. Ranboo's hand had moved to hover over his shoulder and Tommy flinched at the memory of much rougher, violent hands on him that were nothing like Ranboo's. The enderling soothed, "Easy. Don't try to turn. Trust me, you don't want to rip your stitches again."

Again? Stitches? Dread curled in his stomach.

His wings twitched behind him but he failed to feel the brush of feathers against him. Maybe they were back in his back? Perhaps that's why it hurt so bad. It was a different kind of pain though, not the cramped feeling of bones squished together far beyond their limit. It was almost...empty.

Tommy reached behind him to touch his wings and met nothing but air. His heart froze.

No.

No, no, no, no, no, no. Gods please, no. Please. I didn't do anything wrong. What have you done?

Tommy let out a choked cry that sounded akin to a dying animal. His hand pressed lightly against the bandages that covered his chest and back. But more importantly, the bandages that covered the gaping gashes in his back from where his wings had been violently torn from their stems.

Why? Why?

Tommy curled over on himself and slapped a hand to his mouth as sobs wrenched from his chest involuntarily. His wings. His wings that he'd hated, had *loathed*, had wished millions upon millions of times that he'd never had at all. His wings that he loved and cared for the best he'd been allowed. His pride and his scorn. His hope. His wings had been the only reason he'd been worth anything at all to Dream. And now they were gone. *They were gone.*

His brother had betrayed him in the worst way imaginable. His brother wasn't even his brother. His brother was the monster that had ripped out his wings and stolen him from his family.

"R-Ran-" Tommy cried and instantly the bed dipped slightly as Ranboo took a seat across from him. They slowly lifted Tommy's face from his hands.

Thick hot tears burned the tips of the enderling's fingers but if they felt it, they didn't show it. The only thing Tommy saw in Ranboo's mismatched eyes was unbelievable sorrow and grief. The enderling's chin wobbled as they said, "I am *so* sorry, Tommy. *I'm so, so sorry.*"

Tommy shook his head as more tears spilled over and he asked in a voice so small it was nearly inaudible, "Why? Why'd he do it?"

Ranboo tucked Tommy's strangely clean hair from his eyes and said, "I don't know. I don't know why the world is so cruel to people like us but I am so sorry, Tommy. It shouldn't have happened. None of it."

"T-they're gone," Tommy gasped and then fell forward into Ranboo's chest. The enderling wrapped their arms tight around him, careful to avoid his bandages. They ignored every last tear that stained their shirt as Tommy wept for the life that had been stolen from him, the one he was to gain, and the one that had never been real at all.

It could've been minutes, maybe hours, or perhaps even days, but eventually, Tommy's tears subsided as he found he had no more left to shed. He was dehydrated, sore, and so utterly exhausted. And yet sleep did not find him as he lay silent and still in Ranboo's hold. His head rested against their shoulder and Tommy could feel the enderling's chin on the top of his head. His friend was so tender and patient with him it was near enough to bring him to tears again. Nearly. Besides, the last thing he wanted to do was subject Ranboo to more burn wounds than he already probably had. His stomach twinged with guilt.

Finally, Tommy spoke after an eternity of comfortable silence, "...Where is everyone?"

Ranboo shifted in his arms, startled by the question. They continued to rub circles into his shoulder as they explained, "They're outside in the waiting room. They've been there since it happened."

Tommy frowned. "Why haven't they come in?"

Ranboo sighed. "They're waiting till you're ready. They won't come till you invite them. Bad said it could stress you out if you had to deal with everything at once."

He nodded subtly, yet appreciatively. He didn't want to say out loud that he didn't want them here. The truth was that he wanted to see his family. He wanted to see them so badly it hurt but he wasn't ready. He knew he wasn't. Not today at least. "Are they okay?" he asked.

"They're as well as can be expected... The past few days have been pretty heavy on all of us. We were terrified you might take a turn for the worse, or that something might..." Ranboo trailed off but Tommy could fill in the blanks. Ranboo swallowed. "...W-we've just all been on edge."

He was terrified to ask but he knew there was no way he'd be able to sleep again without the answer. Though with it he might not sleep regardless, but at least he would know. Tommy's voice shook as he asked, "...Did they find him?"

Ranboo's face fell and they sighed, heavy with grief...and anger. Suddenly they reached over Tommy to grab something from the bedside table. A dainty purple flower was placed in his hand. Tommy stared at it quizzically. He recognized the flower of course, it was clearly an allium. He just had no idea why Ranboo had given him one. He looked back at Ranboo who simply said, "They're for good fortune...and unity."

Ha. Unity. There was the irony again.

"Good fortune?" Tommy questioned, unsure where Ranboo was going with this.

"Yes. Because you deserve so much better and I wish I could say that they found him. I wish so much that I could. Because it's not *fair*." Tears welled up in the Enderling's eyes and Tommy tried to reach up to stop them from falling but Ranboo gently held his wrists as the tears burned painfully against their cheeks. Ranboo sniffled. "I got my wings back and you lost yours and it's not *fucking fair*."

The uncharacteristic swear made Tommy jump. The teen shook his head, pushing past his hands, letting the allium fall into his lap. Tommy gently blotted away any tears with a napkin he found near him. "You deserve the chance to fly, Ran. I'm glad I could give that to you...even if I lost my own."

This was always the plan, Tommy. Tommy swallowed harshly and pained as Dream's cold voice echoed in his mind. "I think...I think this was always meant to happen. Like a fucked up fate, y'know? I think I was kinda doomed from the start."

“Tommy...” Ranboo breathed. Tommy picked up the allium from his lap and gave an empty smile as he thumbed the petals gently.

“I was never meant to fly.”

With that, Tommy curled back up against his pillow, tucking his arm beneath one so he could bury his face in the fabric and hide his grief from the world.



Fire burned inside him even though he'd been extinguished days prior. He furrowed his brow.

"I remember Tech reading me stories when I was small and maybe I'm like that one winged guy. Our wings weren't meant to last so we fell from the sun..." Tommy murmured as he stared at the allium in his hand. "The stars didn't catch Icarus...but my father caught me. So I'm grateful for that much."

He felt a weight at his side and turned to bury his face into Ranboo's chest. Ranboo's arms gingerly wrapped around him and the Enderling settled in the nearly-too-small bed for them. After a moment Tommy tried to pull himself together enough to lighten the mood even if only slightly, "There's a Tubbo-shaped space between us."

Ranboo gave a weak attempt at a laugh into his hair. Then they frowned. "I haven't seen him in days. I can't get him to leave his lab, no one can but Schlatt."

"He blames himself. I already know he does. He gave me the key to the Nursery. But it's not his fault," Tommy said immediately. "He needs to know that. I don't blame him. Without him, I might've died not knowing who I was. I owe him a lot."

"He won't see it that way. He won't see reason. All he does is work on those compasses with his injured hands." Tommy was about to interrupt with a number of questions but Ranboo quickly explained, "He didn't take the news of you getting hurt well. In a fit of shock, he busted up his hands pretty badly. We were able to heal it some but he's got it in his head that he has to finish this compass thing for you and he refuses to rest."

"I can try to heal him when I'm stronger," Tommy offered immediately. His powers were still shot. The normal flame that usually raged inside him was cold now...it almost felt empty.

But this was Tubbo. His...best friend. Tommy's breath hitched slightly as he recalled falling asleep *that night* with Tubbo half on top of him like the clingy bastard he was. And then waking up, shaking and terrified by a white mask that would haunt him till the day he died, only to find the boy was nowhere in sight. And he would never see him again. The Tubbo-shaped space between him and Ranboo suddenly felt like an abyss.

"Tommy...no one expects that from you. You don't need to, we have the resources—"

“Tommy, I’ve had a long day just fuckin’ heal me already and scram.”

Tommy shoved the awful memory away and immediately sputtered, “I don’t care. It’s the only thing I’m good for anymore. My wings are gone. My powers are all I have now.”

If they would only work. Please work. Why can’t I feel you anymore?

Ranboo sat up, suddenly angry, which was *new*. They growled, “Don’t say that! Don’t ever say that.”

“It’s true,” Tommy said almost as if he was reciting it. He sat up as well. “I am nothing without my powers. That’s all he ever told me...”

Ranboo grabbed his shoulders and his attention in one fell swoop so they could frustratedly exclaim, “*For the love of*—We don’t care about your powers, Tommy! We care about *you*.”

Oh.

And that was what did it.

Tommy choked on his words. It was like a hand around his throat, squeezing it shut. His will crumpled. Because that really was it, wasn’t it? The *exact* words he’d begged to the stars every night that he’d hear from Dream. And Ranboo had said it so *casually*. And he couldn’t bear it.

“No. No more,” Tommy curled into himself, wrapping his arms around his legs and burying himself into the safe place in his mind where he was nothing but a shadow that nobody loved and nobody saw.

Irony, again.

Because he wanted so badly to be loved. But he hadn’t expected it to be so painful. *Love is beautiful as it is painful*. His mother had told him, and she was right.

It was too much. Tommy could feel himself begin to shut down.

“I’m nothing. Just fuckin’ let me be nothing.” He realized then that he had underestimated just how deep the hooks Dream had left in him were. Dream had told him only he would love him. He was nothing without Dream’s love. And Dream had hurt him, had betrayed him, had tossed him away because he wasn’t worth anything to him.

Dream didn’t love him. And Tommy was nothing without Dream.

Hands wrapped around him, comforting and gentle as they raked through his hair, lulling him out of that horrid place in his brain.

“You have never been nothing, Tommy,” Ranboo said. “To us, to your *family*, you are everything. Just *breathe*. ”

That’s...real.

Ranboo was right. He had to remember that. Dream was a liar. Tommy could be everything. His family cared about him. It was real. It was real no matter how many times the hooks in him ripped at him to forget. *This is real.*

Dream’s lies coiled around him like a snake threatening to eat him alive. And yet there was that little boy in him that was so confident, so vibrant and brave. He was fighting like hell. And he was the only reason Tommy’s mind hadn’t shattered.

Everything was tangled and he was trying so hard to fix it. Yet his hands couldn’t work fast enough.

So finally Theseus breathed and Tommy drifted off to sleep.

And neither of them were nothing. Ranboo would make sure Tommy would learn what had taken himself a lifetime to believe.

That they were worthy of love.

Ranboo slowly pulled away as soon as they were positive Tommy was asleep. The moment they were free from Tommy's death-grip, relief and pain and so many emotions whirled around in their head so fast they felt dizzy.

They busted out the door and words tumbled from their lips faster than they could process its meaning as they stared teary-eyed at Philza and Techno who seemed to have been having their own emotional revelation.

"Woah, easy, kid. Slow down, say it again," Techno said.

Oh, oops. Apparently, that hadn't been English. Ranboo inhaled deeply to focus and then breathed, "He woke up. Tommy woke up."

Philza nearly collapsed at the news. He grabbed hold tight of his cane and stumbled back a moment until Techno caught him.

Phil covered his mouth with his hand and stifled a sob that conveyed too many emotions for Ranboo to count. Techno's hands shook as he helped his father to the couch. As soon as he was sat Techno turned to them and the unsteadiness of his voice admittedly frightened them at first. Because they'd never heard anything like it from Techno. Their mentor was a pillar of untouchable strength, with not a weakness in sight. The Emperor had been a god in their eyes till the day they realized how flawed he truly was.

And in that moment Ranboo learned two things; invulnerability was a myth and it was truly incredible how quickly the weight of the world could be lifted from one's shoulders with just a sentence.

"Ranboo!" Techno called again and the teen startled.

“S-Sorry! I– what did you say?”

“Is Tommy okay?” Techno strained, looking close to bolting into the room.

“No,” Ranboo said immediately as if the question itself had been redundant. Techno’s eyes widened in anxiety and Ranboo fiddled with their hands awkwardly for a moment trying to piece their thoughts together. Finally, they replied, “I don’t really know if someone can be ‘okay’ having gone through what he did. He is very....broken. I mean he’s with it, I suppose. He knows who he is and what happened but he...”

Ranboo cut off, words stuck and meaningless in their throat. They couldn’t find an answer.

Phil noticed the teen’s struggle and decided to approach them differently by asking, “Does he need us?”

While Tommy hadn’t explicitly said that he didn’t want to see his family, Ranboo could piece together pretty clearly that he wasn’t ready. They weren’t one to normally make judgment calls, but they would do it now for Tommy’s sake. “He was upset even with my presence after a bit. I told him we care about him and he shut down entirely. He doesn’t believe me. I don’t think he’s ready yet. He wants to see you, of course. But he needs time to process...everything.”

Phil nodded solemnly. “Okay. Okay, we can do that.” He buried his face in his hands.

“Should we wake, Wil?” Ranboo asked and Techno quickly shook his head while still appearing deeply conflicted from what Ranboo had said a moment ago.

“No, let him sleep. It’ll be a while before Tommy wakes back up anyway. He might as well get as much rest as he can. In fact...we should all probably rest while we can,” Techno said, practically collapsing on the couch by his father. He gently elbowed Phil. “That means you, old man.”

Phil gave what vaguely sounded like a laugh and leaned back against the couch to bump the back of his head gently against the wall. He sighed, “Twat.”

Techno snorted and then turned to Ranboo. “Do you need to go get some sleep, kid? Or are you okay to keep watching him?”

Ranboo shook their head. “I’m good. I dozed a bit while in there so I can stay with him a bit longer.”

Techno nodded as he settled back into the couch, finally letting sleep fully embrace him for the first time since this hell had begun.

“Just let us know when you want to switch. You can’t stay awake forever, you know,” Phil said, already looking half asleep.

“I can certainly stay awake longer than you can.” Ranboo grinned and Phil swatted at them.

“Little shit.”

Ranboo strolled back into the Infirmary and for just a moment they felt just a wave of bittersweetness because Tommy had woken up, if only briefly and that gave them hope that maybe things might turn out okay.

Tommy had all the time in the world now to heal. To recover the same way he had all those years ago. Maybe Ranboo was getting ahead of himself. Perhaps they should just hope that tonight will be a good night.

Of course, they were wrong.

It happened in the dead of night. The world was still and Philza was fast asleep with his nether-born heater of a son asleep while leaning against his shoulder. It was quiet. It was warm. And it was peaceful.

And then it wasn't.

The sound of a scream, high-pitched and broken in agony and gut-wrenching terror tore through the silence of the night.

"Papa! Papa!"

Philza had never shot to his feet so fast in his life. There was only one person who'd ever referred to him as that. The twins had been too old to consider calling him Papa. They'd gone straight to "Dad."

But Theseus...

"Let go of me, you fucking bitch! Papa!" Tommy cried, terrified and broken and Philza rushed to the door. His hand shot to the handle but he didn't open it. He couldn't. Tommy wasn't...he'd said he wasn't ready...but...

"Dad, *go*," Techno called out from behind him and Phil turned to see his son staring at him with an almost jealous but understanding expression. He heard Tommy wail out more curses and broken sobs and Phil choked back a cry of his own. That was all the convincing he needed to open the door and rush inside. Phil's eyes widened as he took in the scene before him.

Tommy had pressed himself into the corner of his bed, ignorant of the way his back was probably painfully digging into the bedframe. His hair hung tangled and knotted in front of his feral yet glazed-over eyes. His face was wet with tears. The boy was thrashing rather aggressively against Ranboo who seemed to be desperately trying to calm him down. The enderling turned to Phil and explained, "I can't get him to wake up. He's having a nightmare. Help me!"

Tommy pushed against Ranboo's hold and wailed, "Please don't hurt him! Get off me, motherfucker! I'll kill you!"

"Ranboo, Let him go," Phil ordered, concerned Tommy might try to make good on that statement in his half-crazed state. Almost immediately the enderling backed off, deciding it was better to exit the room and flee to Techno.

The moment Ranboo was gone, Phil rushed to Tommy's bedside. Tommy felt the mattress dip and instantly he screamed, "No! No! Go away! Just leave us alone!"

He wasn't going anywhere. Never again. "I'm here, Tommy. It's me. It's Papa." He slowly reached up to brush the hair from his hazy eyes. Phil let out a bubbled cry as his little boy came into view. Tommy's face was streaked with tears and his expression was scrunched up in either pain or terror. Probably both if Phil had to guess. But he was real. His bright-eyed Theseus who had been so confident and happy had grown without him into Tommy. A scrawny and skittish teen whose mouth was faster than his mind. Whose sadness and pain broke his heart. Who was effortlessly funny and kind and so *brave*.

Tommy was perfect. His son was *alive* and *perfect* and he was so *proud* of him.

At first, Phil's touch only seemed to frighten him more. The boy jolted back and sobbed, "Please, there's nothing left. You already took everything. I just want my Dad. Leave me alone."

Phil decided then and there he was going to rip Chaos apart limb from limb. Phil held Tommy's face gently and the teen sucked in a terrified breath but didn't move away. Phil's voice cracked as he said, "Oh my son. I'm sorry I couldn't be here sooner."

"I want my Dad," Tommy's voice was hardly above a whisper.

Phil nodded and promised him, "You have me, kid. I'm not goin' anywhere."

Tommy stilled in his grasp and his sobs subsided into sniffing. He looked up at Phil and finally, the haze cleared. Tommy's blue eyes that mirrored his own brightened and he saw recognition flicker across his face. The teen shifted up from where he'd been crouched in the corner and he glanced around the room confused for a moment. Phil sighed in relief as he could tell he'd finally woken himself up. Tommy looked up at him and his eyes widened incredulously as he asked, "Phil?"

Phil brushed a strand of hair from his son's face and smiled softly. "Hey, mate."

Tommy reached up with shaky hands and gently ran his bony and cold hands across his cheek, his nose, his jaw like he was charting out the cartography of his face, afraid he might forget it...again.

His son smiled wobbly and disbelieving and breathed, "You're alive?"

"I'm alive." Phil let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding, though it felt like he'd been holding onto it deep in his chest for far too long. Phil smiled, wobbly and free.

He wasn't sure who broke first or if they both just simultaneously fell apart at the same time. But Tommy collapsed into his arms and Phil pulled him close and held onto him like a lifeline. He held him so tight he was scared for a moment he might hurt him but Tommy was clinging onto him just as fiercely. They were both sobbing. It was ugly and snot-filled and *real*. It was everything it should've been for a reunion eleven years in the making.

Philza had long since abandoned the idea that he would ever hold his youngest in his arms again but here he was. He wasn't a ghost or a vision or whatever fucked up nightmare the gods decided to bestow upon him in his slumber. Theseus was home and real and clutching onto him so tight Phil would probably have bruises later on from his grip. And he would be happy to bear them just to have this one moment where nothing else in the world mattered because it was over. That cursed prophecy that he'd damned a million times was fulfilled and they were free. He had his little boy back and he was never letting go again.

"You're here. You're here," Tommy gasped into his shoulder and Phil let out a wet laugh and pressed a kiss into his hair. "Holy shit. You're really here."



Phil nodded. "I'm here, Thes. Good luck getting rid of me now."

Tommy sobbed and clutched the back of his shirt. "I didn't mean to get rid of you. I tried- I mean ____"

"Oh mate, of course not. It wasn't your fault. Goddess, it wasn't your fault. I'm so sorry, Tommy," Phil promised while cradling the back of his head. "I'm sorry for all of it."

"S'not your fault. You got shanked," Tommy said half-mumbled into his chest and Philza chuckled. He gently pulled Tommy back and held his face again. Tommy's hands grabbed his wrist as Phil took his time memorizing each detail of his son's face even though he had all the time in the world now.

"*Look at you.* You're so grown..." Phil marveled and brushed his thumb across his cheek, catching stray tears. "...But I still see *you*. My little Theseus. My Tommy. *My son.*"

Tommy shook his head, suddenly looking pained. "I'm not, though. I mean...how can I be? I don't remember everything. I just remember that last day and a few other things. The rest is all jumbled up. I know you. I know who you are and what happened and what you mean to me...but I feel like a fuckin' fraud anyway."

"You're not," Phil said simply and when Tommy didn't meet his gaze he reassured him, "Tommy, you could have no memories at all and hate my guts and I wouldn't love you any less."

Tommy tensed for a moment at that but then simply nodded against his palm, looking down, and Phil understood. It didn't hurt that he wasn't ready to say it back. He didn't expect him to. He could wait. He'd wait forever if he had to. The only thing in the world that mattered was that Theseus was safe and alive in his arms. And Phil would *gladly* repeat that fact to himself, to others, to the entire world as many times as he wanted to.

Tommy pushed himself back into his father's arms. His nose brushed against his own necklace which bore his wedding ring and Kristin's, ready and waiting for the day she returned to him. Phil had found it closed in his still-bloodied palm when he'd come to after being stabbed...after dying. If he remembered correctly, Schlatt had had to get him up off the floor after that discovery. His body had been too wracked with grief to stand. Tommy's expression crumpled further as he gently brushed his fingertips against the gold ring and thumbed at the emerald embedded in Kristin's. Suddenly Tommy stifled back a cry and Phil startled, fearing for a moment that he'd hurt him.

“I lost her. I’m so sorry. I lost Mum. I tried but she—she said...Crow’s gone. And I—“ Tommy cried, unable to get the words out, but Phil nodded in understanding.

“I know. I know. It’s okay,” He promised whilst shushing him gently. “She’s so proud of you, Theseus.”

The teen went silent for a long moment and Phil could tell he didn’t believe the words he said. Eventually, Tommy whispered, “She told me to tell you...that she loves us. She loves you with everything she is.”

My love, I miss you more and more with every beat of my heart. I love you. I will love you so long as there is air in my lungs and further still. For then I know I will be able to hold you once more when my heart that is yours stills at last. Thank you for saving our son.

“And I her,” Phil replied. Tommy suddenly winced as he shifted more squarely into his arms and Phil pulled back to ask, “Are you in pain? Is it your back?”

Tommy nodded sheepishly as he gnawed on his already raw bottom lip. Suddenly he paled rather nervously. “D-Did you want to ask about it? What happened? What he—...I mean don’t you need to know what he did?”

Phil was pretty sure all the self-restraint that he’d spent years building carefully up to protect his boys from his violent legacy as The Angel of Death would crumble to *dust* if he heard what Chaos did to his son right now. He couldn’t bear it. Not when Tommy seemed so small and fragile in his arms. So worn nearly beyond repair. There wouldn’t be a force strong enough to keep him from hunting down Chaos. And he knew if that happened...Techno would follow him without a second thought.

And he couldn’t risk that. Beyond that...he couldn’t bear seeing Tommy relive a nightmare so soon after pulling him out from another.

“Oh, Tommy, we don’t have to talk about anything till you’re ready,” Phil assured him. “All you need to do right now is rest and get better. Speaking of feeling better, give me one second while I go get Bad—“

The moment Phil tried to pull away Tommy yelped in terror and clung onto his waist as tight as he could while frantically begging, “Don’t go! Please don’t go. It doesn’t hurt that bad. Just...*please* don’t leave me alone.”

Phil ruffled his hair gently while his own heart *ached* and then murmured in assurance, “It’s just for a moment. I promise I won’t even leave the room. I’ll just let Techno know, okay?”

Reluctantly, Tommy nodded, and limb by limb he unhooked himself from his father. And as quickly as he could manage Phil walked over to the door and leaned out to whisper a few instructions to Bad and to briefly fill in Techno.

Not a moment later, he was back. He carefully scooped up his son and curled him back into his arms as he settled on the bed. There was a part of Phil that remembered the last time he was able to hold his son like this. He brushed his hands through his hair, threading his fingers tenderly through long golden hair that no longer curled the way it did when Tommy was young. Tommy sniffled quietly and Phil could feel the dampness from where his youngest cried quietly into his shirt.

“I’m so sorry, Tommy,” Phil whispered quietly and his eyes trailed down to his son’s pristine bandages.

Tommy shook his head and pressed his face further into Phil’s shirt. He mumbled, “I don’t need them. It’s okay. This is enough.”

That’s not the point...

“Nor do I need mine anymore, but I’d be devastated if I lost them,” Phil countered. Tommy tensed for a moment in his arms but eventually, he nodded into his shoulder. “They were a part of you, Toms. I’m so sorry I couldn’t...I just wish...” Phil sighed, defeated. “You never even got a chance. It’s not fair.”

Tommy laughed hollowly and said, “Nothing for me has ever been ‘fair’, and I knew that long before Techno and Wilbur found me in my tower. However...despite everything, you guys are the first good thing to happen to me in a long time.”

Suddenly Tommy burrowed his face into his neck and after a moment he choked, “I thought you were *dead*. I really did. I remember it now. I saw Dream stab you and I thought it was a stupid thing to do. Because nothing could ever hurt you. You’re my dad. Dads are supposed to be invincible but...*you went down*. A-And I screamed for you to get up as he snatched me away from you...but *you didn’t*. There was so much blood and you were so *still*. You—and then he hurt Tech and Wil... and I-I lost you.”

“*Shh*...it’s alright. I’m alright. I’m not going anywhere.” Phil rocked him gently in his hold, doing his best to console the trembling boy. All the while, his chest *burned*. Because now he knew.

Techno had been right. *It was Dream*. The bastard who’d killed him and stolen Theseus. *Chaos*. Tommy’s own ‘brother’, someone he’d trusted so deeply, had betrayed him in the cruelest way imaginable. Chaos had spent *years* making him keep them in for absolutely *no fucking reason* other than sadistic enjoyment and then torn out his son’s wings *the moment* he was fully-fledged.

Phil inhaled long and deep through his nose. Tommy needed him. Chaos could wait.

Phil swallowed his rage for Tommy’s sake and pressed a kiss to the top of his head. It wasn’t long after that Bad came in to administer more medicine. Though admittedly it had taken a few minutes to coax Tommy out of his shirt and convince him that there was nothing to fear from Bad. Afterwards, his son settled comfortably against his chest and slurred sleepily, “M’glad I’m not dead. Glad yer not either.”

Philza hummed lightly and replied, “I’m glad too. Now get some sleep. I’ll stand guard for both you and your dreams. No more nightmares on my watch.”

“M’kay...” Tommy mumbled and in seconds the boy’s expression softened and his breaths evened out. All Phil could do was stare in awe and try not to openly sob because that would definitely wake the boy.

Instead, he allowed silent thankful tears to stream down his face as he continuously ran a hand through his son’s hair. He was still in disbelief at the sight of Theseus sound asleep against his chest. He hoped Tommy would be open to seeing Wilbur and Techno when he woke. He wanted nothing more than to have Theseus be surrounded by his *true* family.

So there would be no more doubt.

“I’m not goin’ anywhere, kid,” Phil murmured to the boy who was already snoring softly. “You’re going to be so *loved*, Tommy. You already are but you just don’t believe it yet. And I know Techno doesn’t want me making promises right now but...I promise I’ll be worthy enough for you to call me ‘Dad’ again one day.”

And he meant it more than anything.

Chapter End Notes

Welp, next week we get two more reunions so ooo I wonder who they'll be teehee

I'll see you lovelies in the next chapter<3

If you liked this chapter, consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also, you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you like art for TGP consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I’m also on Twitter, Tumblr, Tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

Will You Love Me for Who I Am Not Who I Was?

Chapter Notes

y'all ready for some actual fluff and found/actual family?

TW: PTSD

Word Count: 7.9k

This chapter was beta read by the lovely @arbitersart <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next time Tommy woke, it was light out. The sun peeked through the shades and Tommy knew immediately that he'd been asleep for quite awhile. The fog in his mind cleared quicker than it had last time. His arms twitched, searching for his father but his hands were met with only the soft cotton sheets of the bed. He felt himself panic slightly when he realized he could no longer feel warm arms holding him tight to his father's chest, protecting him.

His limbs felt heavy beneath him and slowly but surely he managed to shift himself to his side, groaning quietly at the way his back burned. He inhaled deep through his nose, waiting for the pain to pass, and it was only when it dulled to a tolerable constant ache that he pried his eyes open.

And the first thing he saw...was his brother.

"C'mon, Theseus. See my hand? Now you. Hold the bow...yes, just like that." Techno smiled at him while Theseus concentrated hard, trying to mimic his brother's posture. His shaky hand brought the bow of the violin to rest upon a recently tuned set of strings. Theseus shifted his hand around the neck as he focused. Techno rested his chin atop his brother's head and chuckled, "You look so serious, it's weird."

"You're weird," Theseus shot back with a frown. "I look fuckin' awesome."

Techno snickered and asked, "Who taught you that word?"

Theseus grinned as he brushed the bow along the “A” and “D” string, creating a squeaky sound that made his older brother’s ears flick back. “Schlatt.”

Techno rolled his eyes. “Of course he did. Just don’t let Mom hear you.”

Tommy swallowed. Techno sat in a chair at his bedside, his arms crossed over his chest in a grumpish manner that suited him. His head was tilted slightly to the side and his face was soft with a sleep that Tommy guessed was well-earned. Looking at the way he was positioned, Tommy gathered he hadn’t meant to doze off. He stifled a chuckle that choked him in his throat. He’d hoped he’d get to see him again. In the last moments when Dream and George had been... Tommy shifted, suddenly uncomfortable. Well... he’d worried Techno wouldn’t be able to keep his promise.

Slowly, while knowing even the slightest noise might wake the ever-vigilant insomniac that was Technoblade, Tommy shifted up in the bed. He didn’t dare lean back. Despite how floaty he felt right now, no pain medication in the world would muffle that kind of pain. Tommy crossed his legs beneath him. Techno hummed in his sleep and Tommy hoped his dreams were more pleasant than his had been.

The panic he’d felt the moment he’d realized his father was no longer by his side was relieved easily by Technoblade’s presence. But of course, it didn’t last long because Tommy stupidly made the decision to lean forward so he could try and peek through the open door on the other side of the room. A wave of pain shot through him from his lower back up to his shoulders. It wasn’t like the burning pain from before. It was duller, a deeper kind of ache from what he assumed was one hell of a bruise and swelling that made his spine feel stiff. Despite his best efforts, he could not stop the small cry of pain that left him. The pain dulled as quickly as it had come but Techno’s eyes instantly snapped open, looking for danger but the only thing he saw was Tommy looking at him with such softness that the man looked ill.

“S-Shit...I,” Techno stammered, uncharacteristically, and Tommy frowned.

And then Techno got up from his chair and a new wave of terror surged through him. *No, no, no, no.* Techno raked a hand through his unruly hair and his eyes were trained on the floor as he explained, “I didn’t think you’d be up so soon...I’m sorry. I know you don’t want me here.”

What?”

Techno shook his head as he turned aimlessly looking for a way out. He eyed the door like it was his haven. Of course, it wasn't but Tommy could see he was too scared to admit anything else. "I'll go. *I'll go*. Sorry."

"*Tech*," Tommy's voice was quiet, near inaudible but the way Techno's ears flickered in his direction made him positive that he had heard him. The man stilled and his hand rested against the doorway. "Please, wait."

Techno flinched, his back turned to him. His voice was still gruff with sleep, "Phil got pulled into a meeting he couldn't get out of and Ranboo needed some rest...but we didn't want you to wake alone. Still, I thought you wouldn't wake till Phil got back, I'm sorry. I don't want to upset you so I'll go."

Tommy sat blankly for a moment, dumbfounded by the idea of Techno 'upsetting' him. He twitched his nose, disgruntled by the implication. "*No*. I don't want you to go."

"But you said—"

"Fuck whatever I said. I want to talk to my brother," he said. And he meant it more than anything. It was then that Tommy finally saw that same guilt in Techno's posture that he'd seen in Phil. It was wearing him down like chains and Tommy wanted nothing more than to relieve him. "It's not your fault."

Techno tensed like a rod and his knuckles turned white as they gripped the doorframe. He sounded strained as he asked, "*Not my fault*...Primes, kid, have you seen yourself?"

"Yes," Tommy answered lowly, scowling as he crossed his arms over his chest, hugging himself.

"Then you know that's not true. Don't do that. Don't lie to me."

"I'm not. I'm not a liar." Tommy frowned. "I wouldn't lie to you."

Tommy startled a bit when Techno tilted his head back to laugh, empty and incredulous. “Oh, kid. You’re a *terrible* liar. And yet you’re somehow one of the best I’ve ever met.”

Techno *finally* turned to him and his crimson eyes bore into his own. He slowly walked to the end of his bed and sighed. “Your lies are so good that you seem to have convinced yourself that they’re true. Such pretty and painful lies that buried my brother alive for so long. You lied to me about your birthday, about the necklace. You lied about Dream. *Gods*, you lied about Dream so many times it makes me sick. Because you so clearly believed it. You believed you were nothing. That he loved you. That he’d never hurt you.”

Tommy’s heart pounded in his chest. His voice was dead in his throat. And yet despite Techno’s hurtful words, his eyes were full of such sorrow and love. Tommy swallowed and looked away. “I—”

“Wait...let me finish,” Techno’s voice was steadily beginning to shake. His brother took a moment to compose his words. The two differed so much in that aspect. Tommy spoke his mind, shooting off whatever came first before he’d even processed it. It had gotten him into trouble more times than he cared to remember. But Techno? Techno’s words were like poetry. With each stanza carefully crafted for maximum impact. Techno’s fingers clenched the metal end of the bed as he finally finished his composition, “You lied so well, that I couldn’t see my little brother. Or at least...I pretended you weren’t right in front of me. Though maybe...maybe I’m calling the wrong person a liar. Maybe it was Dream’s words...Dream’s lies that you breathed in and out like air.

It wasn’t some question Techno was asking to himself. He knew as well as Tommy that every time he’d fallen to pieces, it was Dream that had brought him to that brink, without even being there. Tommy decided then and there that he hated that truth being out in the open.

And not because he wished to deny it, he wished to pretend it didn’t exist at all. That he hadn’t had his mind unraveled into threads for Dream to tangle together. He wished he could pretend to be stronger than he was. He hated that he knew he couldn’t be, not now at least.

Techno finally exhaled and his shoulders slumped in exhaustion. He ran his hand through his hair again and said, “You’re right, kid. You’re not a liar. You were a puppet. A pawn. A music box wound to play the same awful tune over and over till you broke.”

He fucking hated metaphors too.

“But I’m not any better,” Techno admitted. “I told you I’d come back but...I was too late. I thought there was time. I thought we had all the time in the world to process it. But I was wrong and it cost you everything.”

Tommy felt his teeth grind together anxiously. “You couldn’t have known that *he’d* be waiting for you to leave. None of you could’ve.”

“It happened before, didn’t it? I should’ve known he’d come after you. Should’ve been ready for it. So tell me, kid. Tell me it was *him* that did that to you. Tell me so I can kill him. Tell me so I can break my promise to Wil and Dad and finish what Mom started. Tell me it was Dream,” Techno begged him. “Please...tell me who hurt you, so I can at least do *something* right before you call me your brother.”

Tommy’s hands were clasped so tightly it hurt. His cheek tasted of iron and tears he did not consent to gather threatened what remained of his composure. So instead of answering Techno’s question, he asked his own, “Why won’t you say my name?”

Techno looked frustrated for maybe half a second before his expression evened out and he paused. He quickly had his answer, “Because it’s not for me to tell you what it is. Everyone else will, but I think you should get to have a say in it. No one should be forced to wear a name they don’t want. So why don’t you tell me what it is?”

Tommy gave a half-hearted smile and said, “That is one hell of a loaded question.”

Techno snorted. “I suppose it is.”

The room fell quiet for a while as Tommy contemplated his answer. Meanwhile his brother finally chose to sit opposing him on the edge of the bed. He crossed his legs beneath himself much like Tommy had and waited, patient and still. And then finally Tommy gritted his teeth in frustration and growled, “I don’t know. I thought for a moment that I did...but...” Tommy shook his head. “I don’t want to be anything new. I have a big enough identity crisis as is but...I mean...Tommy and Theseus. I want to be Theseus...but I’m just *not*. And I’m not Tommy anymore either. I’m some weird fucked up fusion. I have two different lives inside my head and one is screaming at me to break again. I mean...it’s like—”

“Two or—just as a random example— *thousands* of people crowding in your head telling you who you are?” Techno finished the sentence. “Yeah I can see how that’d be pretty frustrating.”

“*Tech*—” Tommy began, stifling a sympathetic laugh and Techno cracked a tiny grin. It was the first time he’d seen him smile since the festival.

“Sorry, sorry. Continue,” Techno said, clasping his hands and resting them in his lap.

Tommy looked at Techno with an intense expression that only made his stomach knot tighter when the atmosphere grew somber once more. “*I see him*. I see Theseus so clearly now. He’s holding my hand and waiting for me to piece it all together while something dark and corroded is still trying to drag him down and leave me with nothing. At least...it’s easier for me to simplify what I feel that way. But...Dream named me Tommy. And while I hate him for it and for everything he did...it’s still my name. It’s just as much my name as Theseus is. So...my answer is both.”

“You want to know who hurt me?” Tommy’s voice dropped low, anger just barely present in the wisps of his tone. Techno nodded slowly and Tommy sniffled and then asked, “If I tell you...can you promise me something?”

Techno hummed hesitantly but eventually sighed, “I’ve broken quite a few promises to you, Tommy. Why would you trust I’ll keep this one?”

“I don’t. But promise me anyway. After all...lies are really pretty don’t you think? So let’s not pretend like you don’t already know who it was.” He reached out to him. Techno’s expression faltered as he stared at him. “And promise me. Promise me you won’t go after him.”

His brother looked away for a moment, swallowing deeply. Eventually, he turned to him and his eyes glossed over as he said, “You’re right. It would be a very pretty lie.”

His hand slowly entwined with Tommy’s. And for a moment it was enough.

“He mentioned you, y’know? ...He said he wanted to repay the favor from that scar you gave him.” Techno sucked in a sharp breath and Tommy clenched his fists and continued, “I understand why you want to hunt him down. Because in that moment...I don’t think I’ve ever been that angry before. I *lost it* and I attacked him and—*heh*, I think you’d be pretty proud of the mark I left on him. Sorry, I know this isn’t helping your whole ‘don’t-go-on-a-revenge-plot’ mindset. But I would’ve done anything at that moment to keep him away from you, Dad, and Wil...*and he knew that*. That’s what he does. He’ll use what you care about most against you.”

“Kid...you don’t need to protect me—”

“*Bullshit, I don’t.* I’m protecting you now just by telling you not to fucking go after him. It doesn’t matter that I’m just a kid, that I’m the youngest. You protect Wilbur and Dad, don’t you? I was too small before to protect you but I’m not anymore. I finally have a real family and I’m going to protect it with everything I have left in me.”

“I’m an adult, Tommy,” Techno growled. “You shouldn’t worry—”

“Then stop giving me a reason to worry, dumbass! Dream isn’t human...he’s a monster and that’s *so hard* for me to admit. He’ll kill you and I just got you back.” Tommy’s hand tightened. His eyes were sharp, and for a moment he wasn’t a child who’d been so gravely wounded by the world. He was himself, he was a firebird without wings. “You don’t get to leave. You don’t get to do that. None of you do. I don’t fucking care how angry you are. *I’m livid.* He was my...”

My family. My protector. Everything. Dream was everything and he was nothing without him. That was the lie that had been shoved down his throat for years. And like a fool—no— *a child*, he had believed him.

“He was my *brother*. He was supposed to love and protect me. Unconditionally, like you said. But he *lied*. He used my own weakness against me so George could drug me. He tried to kill me. If it weren’t for Mum...he would’ve succeeded. He...” Tommy’s voice caught and once again he battled with himself for control before he started crying. Eventually he said, “You were right, okay? He was...awful. Please just let that be enough. I don’t want to lose you again. You promised Dad and Wil right? You promised them you wouldn’t go after him?”

Techno didn’t move. He scarcely breathed, his hand stayed latched onto Tommy’s as the teen leaned forward and narrowed his eyes to hiss, “Promise *me*.”

“Theseus, I—” Techno began but Tommy cut him off quickly.

“I didn’t break. I’m still fuckin’ here. You don’t get to go be a hero on some noble quest for revenge till I’m dead in the ground. And I personally told our Mother that I plan to keep breathing. This isn’t some fairytale when you can overcome some outrageous odds and kill a monster who probably has been around since the beginning of time. There’s no happy ending to be found in that

scenario. You can try to protect me. You can do your best to keep me safe but I *swear to you* I'll return the favor." Tommy yanked his hand away with a snarl. "I don't want you to be my hero. I want you to be my big brother again."

Technoblade swallowed harshly and looked down and away from Tommy. His face was like stone and it was infuriating. A long silence stretched between them but Tommy's glare never faltered as he waited for Techno to say something. Eventually, Techno looked up and immediately flinched at his harsh glare.

"Okay," Techno whispered, relenting. "Okay, I can do that."

And to his own surprise...he believed him. He believed that for now...Techno would stay. Tommy's chin wobbled as he nodded and suddenly he was remembering being on the floor in that nursery, hoping that Techno would save him. He couldn't vocalize that though, not to Techno. He'd just gotten him to agree to stay.

"M'really glad you're here," Tommy said instead, trying to lighten the mood but when he looked Techno was staring at him with indiscernible complexity. Like he was a puzzle to him. "What?"

"Nothing...I just...we've spent this whole time arguing over my own hero complex and now..." Techno shook his head. "I think I'm still trying to convince myself that you're real. We all are, to be honest. I'm so scared that I'm gonna wake up and you're still gone."

Tommy's face fell for a split second before he recovered to raise a brow and then pinched his own forearm. He hummed once in dramatic contemplation and then nodded to himself before giving the verdict, "Yeah, m'pretty positive I'm real. Or is that something unreal Tommy might say?"

Techno stifled a smile but played along. "Mm...I don't know...got another way to prove it?"

Tommy's blue eyes softened and he stretched out his hand toward him. Techno complied easily. He let Tommy guide his hand to press against his bandaged chest. He watched Techno's expression slowly fill with emotion and then Tommy reassured him, "Feel that shit? That's the most fucked up heart you will ever feel in your life. It feels fine, yeah, but it definitely looked worse in Limbo when it was all glowy and cracked. Yeah, don't ask. But..." Tommy smiled softly. "...it still seems to be working. So I'm pretty sure I'm real."

Techno held his breath as he felt his little brother's heart beat strongly in his chest. And eventually, he pulled back to ruffle the teen's hair. His voice caught him off guard when it came out broken, "I missed you...*so much*, Theseus."

Tommy leaned into the touch and frowned, his lower lip wobbling. "I... I didn't know to miss you..."

Techno finally, *finally* wrapped an arm around the teen's shoulders and pulled the boy against his chest, letting Tommy take his own turn to hear his brother's heart beat steadily in his chest. Techno pressed his nose into his hair and murmured, "It's all I ever did."

"*That sucks*," Tommy declared and neither could help it as they broke into soft laughter. It was warm and comfortable and now there were only two holes in his heart that remained...and one of the pieces he was pretty sure was just outside the room.

Techno reluctantly pulled away when he noticed Tommy eyeing the door. Techno sighed, "He's worse than me. He hates himself right now."

Tommy didn't doubt it knowing Wilbur.

"He's an idiot. It's not his fault. I don't know how many times I have to say it but it's nobody's fault and all of you are idiots," Tommy said.

"Thanks?"

"I don't want a pity party and I sure as hell don't want anyone blaming themselves for something that was probably fate or some bullshit."

"Fate?" Techno prodded and Tommy shrugged, looking down at his ragged nails.

"S'what It seemed like to me. When Mum killed George she said something about the gods warning them about what would happen if they hurt me. It didn't seem like they were taking my wings for profit...well at least not *monetary* profit. It was like they needed it for some fucked ritual or some shit. They said the phoe— that *I* was too dangerous to be left alive and that I had to die," Tommy's voice caught in his throat as the events played in his mind. He didn't want to bring up the

whole flaming wings situation yet. It was a whole can of worms he was too tired to delve into. “M’not sure why. It’s not like I was much of a threat at that point.”

“Tommy—” Techno began but Tommy shook his head.

“I shouldn’t have said anything. All talking about it does is upset both of us and make us pointlessly angry.”

“There’s nothing pointless about it, Toms. You have a right to be pissed,” Techno objected.

“Maybe...but it won’t change anything,” Tommy sounded empty, utterly defeated and Techno, although he probably wished to argue, saw that there was very little point in trying to convince him otherwise, at least not at the moment. “I just have to live with it.”

So instead he asked, “Do you want to see him? Wilbur, that is.”

“Does he want to see *me*?” Tommy countered, sounding unsure.

Techno let out a breathless laugh that sounded more pained than anything. “More than anything. It’s been driving him insane that he can’t be at your side. It kept him from sleeping for a while and it got to the point that Q finally staged an intervention and dragged his ass to bed. He’s awake now, though.”

Tommy remembered Wilbur’s hand clutching his own in Limbo and his warm voice murmuring soft assurances to him that he would make it out of this. He and his mother had been what had kept him from floating away into the abyss.

Finally, Tommy swallowed and nodded. “Yeah...yeah I want to see him.”

“Alright, I’ll go grab him,” Techno said and moved to get up. A familiar and uncontrollable panic swelled in his chest and Tommy grabbed his brother’s wrist. Techno turned to him, confused.

“Will you come back?” he asked without thinking and both boys immediately froze. Regret flooded his chest and it was hard to breathe all of a sudden. It was exactly what Tommy had asked on the roof before this whole nightmare had begun.

“Shit-sorry, I—” Tommy began, already feeling himself tear up but he could feel Techno shake slightly at his side. Tommy reached out for the man but Techno held up a hand, stopping him. He was tense and holding his breath as if he was afraid his next breath might break him entirely. Techno was still and silent and clearly trying to wrangle his emotions back under his control.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Techno spoke, voice quiet and wrecked, “Don’t apologize, okay? There’ve been too many apologies between us, Thes. All you have to do is call for me, and I’ll be there.”

Tommy couldn’t find his voice because he feared if he did, he’d probably cry...*again*. Instead, he nodded to his brother and squeezed his hand. And then he let go.

Techno got up and walked out of the room without another word. The moment he was alone, Tommy clamped his hands overtop his ears and squeezed one of his eyes shut while the other practically burned a hole into the door. *Don’t think about it. Breathe. Just breathe.*

One...two...three...four...five...six...seven...eight...nine...te-

The doorknob rattled and Tommy’s head shot up. He quickly scooted forward to sit criss crossed at the edge of the bed. He had a feeling the fetal position he’d previously been curled in would not have been a good look for him. He entwined his shaking hands and rested them tensely in his lap as the door opened.

He could hear someone take a deep breath from just outside his vision and then Tommy’s eyes softened when Wilbur appeared. For someone who supposedly had just gotten a full night’s sleep, he still looked ragged. While his outfit was neat and tidy as one might expect from a prince, his hair was wild and unkempt, and there were dark circles resting underneath his eyes making him look rather ill.

And just as Techno had said, Tommy could see that same guilt weighing him down, drowning him. Crimson eyes met stormy blue and Wilbur instantly stiffened under Tommy’s look of pure concern. It became apparent pretty quickly that Wilbur either had no intention of speaking first or simply couldn’t. Tommy was more than happy to start the conversation.

“I’m not mad,” Tommy began and Wilbur flinched and instantly dropped his gaze.

“You should be. You should hate me,” Wilbur said lowly, voice full of self-loathing. His fists were balled up tightly, turning his knuckles white. He looked up sharply and demanded, “Hate me, Theseus.”

Tommy stared at him as if he had reeled back and slapped him. And for a moment, Wilbur’s expression failed, regret peeking through before it steeled once more. Tommy shook his head and hissed incredulously, “That’s the first thing you say? You had eleven fucking years of prep time and the first thing you tell me is to hate you?”

Wilbur swallowed harshly, darting his eyes away. “Figured it was better to clear the air before I get all weepy and selfish.”

“Asking me to hate you *is* selfish, you prick.” Tommy’s temper flared. “You don’t get to tell me what to do or what to think. I’m *done* being someone else’s puppet. I’m not mad. I don’t hate you. I could never hate you.”

Wilbur ran a hand through his hair, frustrated. His expression contorted mournfully as he exclaimed in frustration, “Goddammit, *why*? Why Tommy? *I left you*. I knew who you were and I fucking abandoned you. Why don’t you hate me?”

Tommy dropped his voice and glared at him as he said, “Because you are everything Dream should have been.”

“*Stop*,” Wilbur warned but Tommy refused.

“Because you, Techno, and Phil care about me more than anyone else ever has before. You believe I’m someone worth caring for.” Tears welled up in Tommy’s eyes and he quickly blinked them away. “That’s everything to me, Wil.”

“Tommy—“

“And because we’ve both suffered enough. I don’t want to be in a world where I hate you, where I hate *any of you*. I don’t think I could bear it. My heart s’not that strong, trust me.” Tommy reached out to him and breathed out shakily, “It’s not your fault I got hurt and it’s not your fault Dream took me. Please know that, Wilbur.”

Wilbur sunk to his knees at the side of Tommy’s bed and pressed his forehead against the edge of the mattress. Tommy clutched at his hand and the brunette’s breath shuttered, “I couldn’t save you. I wasn’t strong enough then and I’m not now. Please. *Please* hate me. I’m begging you. Just scream, rage, anything! *Anything but this.*”

Tommy leaned forward, while still on his side, ignoring the way his back ached and growled, “No. I won’t do that. I won’t hate you, Wil. *I can’t*. And there isn’t shit you can do about it.”

Wilbur’s eyes shone as he met Tommy’s. “Why?” he asked, small and vulnerable. “I hurt you so fuckin’ bad, Toms. I did the one thing I told you I wouldn’t do. *I left*. I ran like the goddamn coward I am. Why are you forgiving me?”

Tommy rested his head on his pillow and said simply, “*You’re my brother, Wil*. You’ve never hurt me. Even when we met in that tower and you hated me for taking Thes-*my* necklace, you never thought of hurting me. What Dream did...that was hurting me. That was...”

Tommy swallowed as he pushed the awful memory away. “You’d never do that. Techno would never do that. None of you would. I trust you.”

He hoped Wilbur knew just how much it meant for Tommy to trust anyone after what just happened to him. Maybe it was naïve but he didn’t care. Theseus loved them. And while it might take him more time to admit it, he was pretty sure he loved them too. He didn’t care if Wilbur didn’t love him back, Tommy knew Wilbur cared for him. It was enough.

Wilbur cried against the sheets, clutching Tommy’s hand and warming his cold fingers. After a moment he sat up to yank off his tear-smudged glasses and try to wipe his eyes. “I don’t deserve to be your brother.”

Tommy frowned. “*Tough*. I don’t care. I don’t want anyone else. Just you and Techno. You owe me a lifetime of being my big brother.”

“I’m a terrible brother,” Wilbur tried again.

Tommy huffed and pulled himself up to sit, batting Wilbur away when he tried to help. “Well, Wilbur. The bar is pretty fucking low right now.”

The two stared at each other, both looking rather pained, and all Tommy could see was the Wilbur who he’d forgotten. The Wilbur that practiced guitar with him clinging onto him, eager to mess with the strings to gain his attention; the one that he’d bickered and fought with as all brothers do; had sung him lullabies when he was scared of the dark. The Wilbur that loved him more than anything and the one that died when he’d gone missing.

But at the same time...he saw the Wilbur that had held his hand in the darkness of the mineshaft and who’d dove back into danger so that Tommy didn’t die alone. The one that he teased and bickered with yet got along with so effortlessly. The one who’d held him when his fear became too much to face alone.

The one who held him when he was dying in their father’s arms.

Theseus’ Wilbur. His Wilbur. His brother.

Tommy wondered if Wilbur saw his brother as well. He sniffled and leaned forward against his shoulder. He felt his own shoulders relax at the comfortable and familiar smell of rain and coffee grounds that finally made sense to him. “Please don’t push me away just because I make you feel guilty. I don’t remember much, just bits and pieces, but I know we were happy. You can’t leave me alone.”

Wilbur reached up and gently pulled him down from the bed and onto the floor so he could hug him as close as he dared. Tommy gripped the front of his coat fiercely. Wilbur’s hold tightened as he promised, “I won’t. I won’t. I love you, Theseus— no, *Tommy*. And if I hadn’t been so fucking blind I would’ve made that clear a hell of a lot sooner. I loved you then and I’ll love you now.”

Tommy finally broke and pressed his face into his shoulder. He turned his head slightly and his voice cracked high as he admitted, “I couldn’t remember to love you. I forgot to love you. I’m so sorry, Wil.”

“Don’t apologize. Don’t you ever fucking apologize. We can wait,” Wilbur promised. “I never want you to feel like you have to say it back. I don’t *want* you to say it until you’re ready. Dad waited years for Tech and me to say it and I’m willing to wait too. No matter how long that takes.”

“I don’t know how to be him. You loved Theseus, not me,” Tommy cried, letting Wilbur gently wrap him up in his arms and pulled the two back onto the bed. His back ached but he didn’t care. It meant nothing. All that mattered was that Tommy had finally gotten what he wanted. He felt loved. *He was loved.* And it broke his heart.

Wilbur shook his head. “Tommy, loving you is inevitable. You don’t have to be him. Just be you.”

“What if I’m not good enough?” Tommy asked, letting out a whimper. Wilbur tensed for a moment before pressing his cheek against his hair.

“Oh, blondie...I wish so much that you could see yourself the way we do. Your powers and your wings were pennies compared to you. You’re priceless, kid,” Wilbur whispered. Tommy shook at the words. “I never expected that I’d get my little brother back. But even more so I never expected you to fit so perfectly back into my life, especially after so long. But you *did*, Tommy.”

Suddenly Wilbur let out a tearful laugh that made Tommy grip at the front of his coat, startled. Wilbur slowly pulled back to cup Tommy’s face in his hands. “The moment I figured out who you were was the best and most terrifying moment of my life. I had you back and you were staring at me with such—trust and worry that it scared me. Because that gut-wrenching fear of losing you hit all at once and I couldn’t breathe I was so afraid. So I panicked. And when I panic, I run.”

“If I had known then who I was...I would’ve been pretty scared too. I don’t blame you for it. What happened next...it wasn’t something any of us could’ve predicted,” Tommy pointed out, lacing one of his hands over top of Wilbur’s.

Wilbur nodded reluctantly. “That’s what I’m trying to convince myself of. Quackity helped me a lot with sorting it all out.”

Quackity. Tommy’s brow knitted together in concentration as that puzzle piece finally slotted into place. Quackity who when he’d known him had just been a kitchen boy who used to sneak him food and dote on both him and Tubbo whenever they snuck down to the kitchen. Quackity wasn’t

just a random staff member of the palace, to Theseus he had been family. Quackity had eventually adopted Charlie long after he'd vanished. Quackity and Wilbur were best friends. They had been since they were children and—

Tommy's eyes widened. *Oh*. One more puzzle piece clicked. They were best friends. And eventually, his brother had fallen in love...with the palace chef. A sincere happiness for the two warmed his heart and he almost felt bad now for teasing them so much. Almost.

"I really hope Quackity doesn't hate me for messing with him so much. Kinda botched that introduction, didn't I?" Tommy admitted and Wilbur snorted.

"Eh. He'll get over it."

"I remember he looked piss scared when Ranboo, Tubbo, and I had gotten caught after the ball. It would've been funny as hell if I hadn't also been scared shitless," Tommy reminisced quietly, stringing the memory into place. "I just wish I'd known that'd be the last time I'd...I mean I don't regret running off because I wouldn't have met Ran and Niki...I just...I wish I could've said goodbye. I wish I hadn't scared everyone."

Wilbur pulled him close again, resting his chin atop his head and gently began threading his fingers through his hair. "I think we would've all done things differently had we known that moment in the ballroom...when we met Grian and Mumbo would be the last time the five of us were all together. I think I would have hugged you a lot tighter that night."

Tommy suddenly let out a wet laugh, "Why'd you have to sing such a morbid fucking song? What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Wilbur was silent for a long moment, so much so that Tommy thought he'd overstepped. And then Wilbur laughed, soft and real and familiar. His voice was much deeper now but it was still the laugh he remembered from so long ago. Wilbur's voice cracked, "It was one of Mum's, I don't know! You liked the melody so you'd usually ask for it."

Tommy giggled and buried his nose against his neck. "It fucking sucks, I mean it's a good song but it's too fuckin' sad. It's a trauma song. Let's never sing it ever again."

“Wonderful idea. Never again.” Wilbur hugged him tighter, careful to avoid his wounds.

“Careful, mate. Don’t squeeze him too hard.” A voice from the door called and Tommy jolted instinctively as he turned to see Phil and Techno standing in the doorway. Techno was staring at the ground. Phil’s brow furrowed in worry but it eased up when Tommy gave him a weak smile.

“I’d argue that it’s beneficial for my health to squeeze me tight. My mental health,” Tommy half-joked, only a little nervous that they might be afraid to touch him. Primes—the amount of affection he probably needed right now was astronomical. “I’ve got strong bones. I can take it. Hugs are more important than bones.”

Phil laughed. “They are definitely not but I think we can find an acceptable compromise.”

Tommy extracted himself slowly from Wilbur’s arms and carefully sat himself upright. His back groaned at the movement and Tommy scrunched up his face in pain for a moment.

“Careful, Theseus,” Techno warned and Tommy’s eyes darted up at the name. It still didn’t sound like his own. He supposed it would take some getting used to. Techno leaned against the doorframe. “You should stay in bed. You need rest.”

“*You need rest*,” Tommy mimicked lowly under his breath and Techno huffed humorously. Tommy frowned though it looked more like he was pouting. “I’ve been resting for days. I’m not gonna get any better if I’m stuck in that bed.”

“Technically he’s not wrong,” Wilbur admitted. “The quicker he’s up the better for him.”

“Don’t give him any ideas, Wil,” Techno grunted but Tommy grinned.

“Too late, I am already plotting a detailed escape involving many drugs, women, and a pair of crutches,” Tommy said proudly.

Tommy could hear Phil sigh tiredly behind him. “There are so many reasons why that is a terrible idea.”

“Says you,” Tommy shot back. “It’s fool-proof. Nothing can possibly go wrong. I’m a genius.”

“Uh-huh...” Techno hummed sarcastically though he looked rather amused.

His father casually rested a hand on his shoulder from behind and the calm and comforting atmosphere snapped in Tommy’s hands. His body reacted before he could fully register the intense rush of fear that chilled him to the bone. Tommy jumped back several inches, nearly crashing back into Wilbur. Said man quickly caught him before he could fall right onto his back. Wilbur softly murmured to him while Tommy did his best to keep his expression blank as he recovered from the pain of the harsh movement. “It’s okay. It’s just Phil. No one else.”

Tommy’s eyes were wide as he sucked in a deep breath and slowly let it out through his nose. He sputtered anxiously, “R-Right, sorry.”

Phil slowly came to sit on the edge of the bed and shook his head. “It’s alright. Don’t apologize. That was on me. No more coming up from behind.”

Tommy nodded shakily. “Thank you.”

Techno finally moved from the doorway and sat down in the chair next to the bed. Tommy slowly extended out his hand towards him and after a moment of staring at it with a sad expression he took Tommy’s hand within his own. Tommy spoke softly, “It’s just a lot. This is a lot. It...*feels a lot* if that makes sense.”

Techno nodded slowly in understanding as he said, “It does.”

Tommy leaned his head against Wilbur’s shoulder and squeezed Techno’s warm hand. He smiled, fragile and uncertain, and teased, “Even to the oh-so-stoic-Blade?”

“You’d be surprised by just how much I feel. I’m just good at masking it,” Techno whispered, leaning forward in his chair to rest his head against the bed atop his free arm. “But...I don’t want you to have to mask it. It’s better to let it out when you need to because you will feel like this for a while. It’s not gonna go away overnight.”

“Sucks.” Tommy hid his face behind his unruly hair. His voice trembled, “It hurts. Everything hurts.”

Techno nodded and let his own voice crack quietly as he replied, “Yeah. Yeah, it does. It will.”

Phil crossed his legs under himself and leaned against his hand as he inputted, “You can talk to us when it’s too much. Or...I can find you someone to talk to privately.”

Tommy’s head snapped up and he quickly shook his head, his jaw clenched tight. “*No*. I don’t want to meet new people right now. *I can’t*. I’d be too scared. I’m sorry, I know it’s childish—

Wilbur’s voice cut in sharply but still gentle enough to not startle Tommy, “It’s not. You were hurt by someone you trusted more than anything—by the only person you had. There’s nothing childish in being scared of people. Not now. Not ever.”

A prince scared of people. How pathetic was that?

He thought of how many times he’d seen his father and Schlatt drowning in work, talking to people, negotiating, and how those duties had undoubtedly been passed along to his brothers...and would’ve been passed to him...if he hadn’t...

He thought of the festival. The people of L’manburg adored and mourned The Lost Prince fiercely. He could tell it was a deep wound in the kingdom. They probably expected a tall and strong well-versed teenager if Theseus ever returned...not him. His hair was shaggy and knotted and he was a pale and thin—lanky *child*. An overall anxious mess of a human. He could barely interact with the palace doctor right now. How could he possibly live up to their expectations of a role model son of an Emperor?

“But...how am I supposed to be a prin...I mean you...” Tommy stammered and then tucked his knees to his chest a bit faster than he should’ve. He buried his face into his knees, ignoring the way it strained his back.

Phil seemed to catch on because he immediately assured him, “Tommy, you don’t need to worry about that right now. No one expects that from you. All you need to focus on right now is getting better and being a *kid*.”

Tommy let out a shuttered breath and ran his hand through his hair. “I don’t want to be anything. Not now. I can’t be Theseus. I can’t even be Tommy. I’m nothing. *Nobody*.”

“Blondie—” Wilbur started but Tommy cut him off.

“*It’s too much*.” Tommy clenched his hand in his hair and wrapped his other arm tightly around his legs. “This is too much. I feel like I’m drowning.”

“Oh, kid...” Phil sighed. “What do you need us to do? You’re overwhelmed. Do you want us to leave?”

“No!” Tommy’s head shot up, his eyes wide and terrified. He couldn’t be alone. Bad things happen when he’s alone. Monsters find him when he’s alone. “*Stay*. Please— I just need a minute.”

“Okay, Toms. We’re here.”

Tommy looked around at his family. *His family*. His voice was small and pitiful, “My memory is *fucked*, maybe even permanently so you’ll have to tell me. I don’t know what’s real and what were the lies he fed me. Nothing in my head makes sense.”

They nodded back to him and Phil said softly, “We’ll tell you whatever you want to know. Just ask.”

“Okay.” Tommy nodded. “I-I trust you.”

Tommy took a few minutes to himself and rested his forehead atop his kneecaps so he could breathe. He tried his best to clear his head. His mind was tired. His back fucking *hurt* and his heart was in tatters. But...despite it all, he knew it was fixable. Sure his powers were shot right now but he didn’t need his healing magic. He just needed them.

“Tommy?” Phil finally broke the silence. Tommy breathed in deeply and turned his head to see his Dad —*his Dad, wow*— holding a glass of water. “Here. You need some water in your system.”

Tommy took the glass and the moment he took the first sip it was like his body finally realized how thirsty he was. He practically inhaled the glass. “Slow down, kid. You’ll make yourself sick,” Techno chided fondly.

“Worth it,” Tommy muttered.

Phil chuckled and went to fill another glass. The next half hour was spent in surprisingly comfortable silence as Tommy slowly rehydrated himself and snacked on crackers and half a sandwich. His family was gentle as ever with him. They didn’t make him feel small and weak for being hurt and vulnerable. They joked around with him and spoke softly with him but not in a way that felt like they were babying him, not that he would blame them right now. They gave Tommy the space he needed and slowly he felt himself relax.

At least until Tommy was offered another dose of pain meds which he quickly refused.

“Theseus—” Techno started but Tommy shook his head.

“I’m not going back to sleep. I’ve slept enough. Besides that shit makes me feel *weird*.”

“Your back is going to hurt like hell,” Wilbur pointed out.

Tommy snorted and raised his water glass to his lips to take another sip. “Yeah well, what else is new.”

“Tommy!” Phil gasped disapprovingly and Tommy ducked his head at the tone.

“Look it’s not that bad. M’just sore. Please? I don’t want to go back to sleep. If it starts hurting bad I’ll take it. I swear,” Tommy pleaded and after a moment or two of Phil looking at war with

himself, the man nodded.

“You tell me the *moment* it starts hurting, got it?” Phil bargained and Tommy nodded eagerly.

“Can I get up?” Tommy asked.

“You will fall flat on your ass within seconds, Toms,” Wilbur said bluntly and Tommy scowled at him.

“Agree to disagree,” the teen huffed and slowly swung his legs over the side of the bed.

“You’re gonna fall,” Techno predicted.

“You’ll catch me.”

“Will I now?” Techno raised a brow.

Tommy felt his feet touch the ground and shifted his weight slowly till he felt confident his knees wouldn’t buckle.

“Tommy...” Phil warned.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “You lot have no fuckin’ faith in me.”

“No, I just don’t have faith in your legs’ ability to keep you upright,” Phil retorted. “You’ve been stuck in bed for *days*.”

Tommy pushed himself onto his feet and grinned triumphantly when he found himself *somewhat* steady. “See? Told you. Perfectly fine.”

His legs were totally not shaking. Nope. Not even a little.

“Yeah?” Wilbur challenged. “Take a step.”

Bitch—

“Fine. I will!” Tommy scowled and flipped him off. He boldly took a step forward and marveled at the way the ground suddenly seemed a lot closer. Calloused hands grabbed him from under his arms and his descent stopped as Techno pulled him back. The man hooked an arm under his knees and scooped him up easily.

“Rude. Rude as hell,” Tommy griped but then he grinned at his brother. “Told you you’d catch me.”

Techno rolled his eyes but gave him a small smile. “I’d rather not extend your stay in the Infirmary.” He deposited him back onto the bed and Tommy huffed.

“Ugh, fine,” Tommy relented. “What the fuck am I supposed to do then?”

“You stay in bed, take your medicine and rest you little hellion,” Phil chuckled, brushing a strand of hair from his eyes tenderly. Tommy stuck out his tongue.

He loathed to admit it, but his back really fuckin’ hurt. But he didn’t want to wake up alone. Or dream of white masks and lost childhoods. So he compromised, “How about this, I’ll take *half* of whatever pain medication you want to stick me with and then I’m your loopy problem for the rest of the day.”

“Lives. And you are far from a problem,” Wilbur corrected.

“A catastrophe then,” Tommy suggested. “An offense against nature.”

“Personally I think that sums all of us up pretty well,” Techno joked flatly.

“You’re all terrible.” Phil shook his head but Tommy could see he was smiling. Finally, he gave in, “Fine. Deal.”

Tommy grinned.

Chapter End Notes

ME WHEN THE FAMILY IS FAMILY 🎉🎉🎉🎉

god it feels so good to write them as a actual family again.

I'll see you lovelies in the next chapter<3

If you liked this chapter, consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also, you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you like art for TGP consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on Twitter, Tumblr, Tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

My Footsteps on the Ground

Chapter Notes

(slowly slides this across the table like i havent been gone for two and a half months) i just worked a twelve hr hosptial shift nobody look at me

TW: None other than slight injury description and Emi's medical jargon

Word Count: 7.5k

This chapter was beta read by the lovely @arbitersart <3

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo thumbed the smooth and shiny metal rim of his compass with his glove. He sighed when he saw a mop of brown hair and tired eyes staring back at him in the reflection. Tubbo let the compass clatter against the table as he buried his face in his arms.

The compasses were done. They'd been done since yesterday. He had no reason to still be in here. He could stare at Theseus' compass all he wanted to but it wouldn't get any better. He had no reason to not be by Theseus' side.

Other than that he was a coward.

A knock on the door made him jump. He turned as the voice of his father called, "Open up, kid. You gotta eat something, you're already stunted enough as is."

"M'not hungry," Tubbo replied. He heard Schlatt sigh irritably. He couldn't say he blamed him, Tubbo had never been one to make things easy. Why should he? Why should he be anything other than a complete pain in the ass?

"Tubbo. Door. Now," Schlatt ordered sternly, but not coldly, never coldly. How Tubbo wished just this once his father would scold him with some actual anger. He wanted a reason to scream at his father and he didn't have one. It was infuriating. Tubbo groaned into his arms as he forced his limbs to function.

“Just let me rot into the floor already. I’m not going out there.”

“Tobias Underscore,” His father warned. *Damn... Not the legal name.*

Tubbo growled, “Fuckin’—*fine. Fine!*” He quickly unhooked the deadbolt and flung open the door with a glare. “See? I’m alive. Happy?”

“Enough,” Schlatt hissed and grabbed his son by the arm, pulling him into the room. His father paused and released him as he looked around at the mess. He sighed and then turned back at the boy who now refused to meet his gaze. He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “This has to stop, Tubbo. You can’t keep hiding away in here and letting yourself deteriorate. I thought at first that you’d snap out of it in a day or two but it’s obvious to me now that you won’t. You’re not sleeping. You’re barely eating. You won’t see anyone other than me, and that’s by force. You won’t even let Ranboo in!”

“They shouldn’t be so worried. I’m fine. I just need time,” Tubbo replied, rolling his eyes.

“This isn’t healthy. You’re scaring them. You’re scaring *me*. And what happens when Tommy inevitably hunts you down because you won’t go to him? You gonna turn him away as well?”

Tubbo’s head shot up. “No! Of course not!”

“Then why won’t you go to him?”

“It doesn’t fuckin’ matter—“ Tubbo pushed past him to walk to his desk but his father grabbed his shoulder.

“Yes, it does!” Schlatt insisted.

“For fuck’s sake--just drop it!”

“No, I won’t. Tell me.”

“I’m scared, okay?!” Tubbo yelled, pushing at his father’s chest trying to force him away. He didn’t succeed very much. He wrapped his arms around himself. “I’m scared because I know what’s going to happen when I see him. He’s gonna look at me with those big hurt blue eyes and forgive me. And I don’t want him to.”

“Tubbo...I thought we went over this—“

“No! *You* went over it!” Tubbo accused, pointing a finger at him. “The only thing I did was let you comfort me because I was in pain and shock. I *never* agreed with you. I can’t.”

Schlatt stared at him while multiple emotions flitted across his face until finally, he sighed. “Whether or not you want his forgiveness...it’s ultimately irrelevant. What matters now is the fact that your friend, *your childhood best friend*, is hurt. He’s home, he barely knows who he is, and he just had his fucking wings ripped out on his birthday. So whether or not you believe that’s your fault doesn’t matter right now. He needs you. He needs you right now, so don’t you *dare* take that away from him.”

Tubbo’s vitriol caught in his throat at his words and he finally felt himself break. “M’sorry. I’m sorry. I’m-I’m sorry, Dad.” He wrapped his arms around himself and tucked his chin against his chest.

His father stood unmoving, probably unsure of whether it was a good idea or not. He ran a hand through his hair and asked, “Tell me what I have to do to fix this. I hate that I can’t. I can never tell what you’re thinking anymore. It’s not like when you were young. You were so easy to read then. Your problems were so easy to solve when they were as small as you were. Not this. I don’t know how to fix this.”

Frankly, Tubbo didn’t know either. He shook his head. “I don’t think you can. I think I have to be the one to fix it.”

Schlatt moved in to wrap an arm around his son’s shoulder, pulling him close. He rested his chin atop his head and pleaded, “Talk to him. He’s been through hell. Just...give him that damn compass you wrecked your hands for—“ They both flinched. “*Shit, sorry* —and *talk to him*.”

Tubbo curled further into his father's chest, hoping that if he pressed far enough he could hide himself away for a few months, maybe even a few years, maybe forever. Alas, he knew he couldn't. He felt his body slump in resignation and his father held him only closer as he relented, "Okay... okay I'll try."

For Tommy, he would try.

"No."

"Tommy—" Phil began.

"*No!*" Tommy yelled, curling himself up onto the bed. He'd taken their weird fucking drugs, he'd let that weird doctor check his vitals and whatnot. But there was no way in *hell* that anyone was touching his wings. "No one is touching them! Never! Never again!"

"Your Highness—" Bad began and Tommy growled—actually *growled* at him.

"Don't fucking call me that!" Tommy's eyes darkened and he felt Wilbur shift at his side nervously. "And don't fucking touch me!"

"Tommy, he's just trying to help," Wilbur pleaded to him but still got the hint that Tommy didn't want anyone near him, even his brother. Wilbur stood to his feet and leaned against the wall while Tommy curled himself into a corner at the edge of the bed, looking ready to run at a moment's notice, not that he would make it far. He'd give himself one solid footstep before face-planting into the floor.

"I don't care," Tommy spat with his expression near murderous as he glared at the doctor who had raised his hands meekly in surrender. "I don't know him."

His head was pounding. It felt like his brain was rattling inside his head as he tried to place the doctor in any memory he could. Nothing came up. "I don't remember him. So I don't trust him."

To his credit, The doctor didn't seem too offended by that.

"What about us?" Phil suggested. He stepped forward slowly and sat carefully at the opposite end of the bed. His hands were clasped in his lap in sight for him to see. "Would you trust one of us to change the bandages? It's really important that we do it."

Tommy swallowed with fear heavy in his throat. He didn't want anyone to touch his wings...or what was left of them. Then again...was there anything left? Was Tommy just protecting something that no longer existed? He could still feel them, he thought. He could feel the phantom brush of his wings against the other, the feeling of his feathers ruffling against his back.

But it was all in his head, wasn't it? There wasn't anything left for him to feel. Nothing left to protect. He'd already failed in that endeavor.

"Please," he begged. "Can't we just let them heal on their own?"

His father's hand came up to futilely wipe away his fear. Tommy flinched away. "You know we can't." Philza's face became grim. "This will kill you if we don't care for it."

Tommy shook his head. "No, my powers...my powers they'll—"

"Tommy..." Phil began and Tommy nervously looked up at him, afraid of the truth in his eyes. "...your powers haven't been healing you, not like before. They aren't working, are they?"

Tommy let his hair fall in his face, trying to hide. He curled his arms around himself and croaked, "I just need time."

"You don't have time. You won't have time if you don't let us clean your wounds. You'll get an infection and you will only get sicker." When Tommy still didn't respond his father's tone grew reluctantly stern. "*Look at me, Theseus.*"

Muscle memory kicked in and instantly Tommy obeyed. He was used to sharp orders and cold tones, but not from Phil. Not that Phil had meant to be either. He saw his father flinch and the tension in the room grew ever thicker. Tommy felt awful. He felt nauseous. Philza swallowed but still said, "I want you to have your boundaries. I want you not to be afraid of me for raising my voice. I want you to feel safe with us. But we have to clean your wound and I cannot bend on that."

"What happens if I still say no?" Tommy tested, because, *of course*, he did.

"We'll have to sedate you," Phil said firmly yet his eyes still glistened. Tommy let out a frightened sound. Phil, to his credit, at least looked as nauseated by the threat as he did. "*Please* don't make us have to do that."

I don't want to go back in the dark. The thought of returning to that cold abyss where his mother's presence no longer watched over him terrified him.

"I can make my powers work! I just..." Anger prickled through him. It was hysteria but he didn't care. "I won't forgive you if you do that. I'll hate you," Tommy lied.

The silence that followed seemed endless.

"...I can live with that," His father eventually answered, his tone empty. The man swallowed. "I'd rather you hate me and be alive than you love me and be dead."

Tommy's eyes flickered around panicked as the thought of hands, even the warm, gentle ones of his father who'd only ever promised him safety screamed betrayal in his mind. Yet he knew what infection was and childish refusal of treatment was playing with a fire that was not his own. He would ultimately be killing himself for no reason. Tommy let out a pitiful sob but he reluctantly nodded, seeing no other choice. Then his stomach curled for a final time and he gagged, "I'm gonna hurl..."

There was a bucket beneath his chin instantly and Wilbur's soft hands pulled his hair from his face as he woefully lost the sandwich and crackers he'd fought so hard to keep down. When it was over, he slumped forward into his father's arms and asked shakily, "C-Can we not do it here? Can we go back to the library at least? I'll feel safer in there...I think."

Phil nodded into his hair. “Of course we can. It won’t take long, okay? Afterward, we can just relax if you want.”

“No sleeping,” Tommy said adamantly.

Phil shrugged. “Not if you don’t want to. We can just talk or whatever you want.”

Tommy looked over to Wilbur and Techno nervously but the two simply nodded at him. Techno then said, “We’re not going anywhere, kid. We’ll be with you the whole time.”

“Don’t you have other stuff to do besides babysit me?” Tommy fiddled with his hands, noting the way his fingers and knuckles were bruised from attacking his brother—*no kidnapper. Abuser. God-fucking-whatever* he was now. “Don’t you guys have like...an entire kingdom to run?”

“Everyone has been on lockdown since you got hurt. Staffing is the bare minimum other than guards. Everything is being handled. You’re what’s important right now, Tommy,” Wilbur explained. “And I know there’s not a single person in L’manburg that would disagree if they knew what was happening. The lockdown will be lifted probably tomorrow but we’ll do our best to keep you out of sight till you’re ready.”

Tommy sniffled. He *really* fuckin’ appreciated that and he had no idea how to express that other than a meek, “Thank you.”

“Are you ready to go then? The guards will clear out the halls and Tech can carry you,” Phil asked and Techno snorted at that, amused that he had become Tommy’s chauffeur.

Tommy looked around, desperate one last time to find a way to avoid having his wings touched but ultimately knew there was no way he was getting out of this. He sighed and retracted himself from his father’s arms, “I guess. Let’s get this over with.”

“That’s the spirit,” Wilbur’s light attempt at humor earned him a half-hearted scowl. Only once they had made it to the library and Tommy had been deposited onto a sea of pillows and blankets a maid had quickly laid out for them did Tommy feel his anxiety creep back up his spine. He saw Wilbur lay out the bandages on the ground in a slow, careful motion, as if Tommy was a skittish

deer he was trying not to startle. Tommy tucked his knees to his chest for a moment before he took a deep breath through his nose and out his mouth.

His father sat behind him and Tommy had to manually relax all of his muscles because frankly he was wound up so tight that the slightest movement could easily have set him off.

“Tommy,” Phil began, his voice quiet and gentle. “Do you think you can take off your shirt?”

At some point, he’d been granted a loose white tunic much like the one he’d come to the Infirmary in, though this one wasn’t stained red with his own blood. Tommy shuttered but nodded and quickly shucked the shirt over his head. His back screamed at the harsh movement but he hardly felt it at all. The only thing he could feel at the moment was his own heart pounding in his chest.

“Breathe, Toms,” Wilbur reminded, scootching forward on his knees till he sat beside the shaking teen. “Take a deep breath. It’s just us.”

Tommy nodded and sucked in a painful breath much too quickly. It stuck in his chest at the feeling of Techno gently peeling off the first layer of his sticky bandages that had been on too long. Tommy felt his lip wobble as the bandages tugged rather painfully against his stitches.

“Sorry, kid. I know this part sucks, bear with me,” Techno said as he peeled back another layer. He heard Techno murmur something to Phil who must have agreed with him back.

He felt warm hands grab his own and looked up at Wilbur with teary blue eyes. Wilbur gave him a soft smile and asked, “Remember all that money we made in town during the festival?”

“What?” Tommy perked up confused and then winced as he felt another tug. He shuffled through his memories for a moment. “Ye-Yeah...what about it?”

“I was thinking later on when you’re feeling better we can take what we didn’t give away and buy a few pastries from Niki’s. Maybe Ranboo could make more of that chocolate one you liked so much?” Wilbur suggested, rubbing circles into his palm.

Tommy was about to agree when the final layer of soiled bandages was uncovered from his skin. He felt a hand ghost over the wound and let out a screech, suddenly forgetting himself. He turned way too fast as he tried to scramble back. Wilbur caught him by his shoulders and shushed him gently, "It's okay. It's okay. Breathe. You're with us."

He looked over at his father and Techno who had frozen in place, trying not to further scare him. Tommy relaxed and shook his head. "Sorry, I—"

"Don't apologize," Phil said simply and patted the spot Tommy had been in before he'd jolted away. Tommy couldn't help it as he let a sob spill over, it was too much. He was a coward and he couldn't do it. He was scared. Scared he'd turn around and see his nightmares rather than his family. He was still terrified that he'd open his eyes and be back in the Nursery. He saw Techno say something to Wilbur that didn't register and suddenly the two were switching places.

Tommy tensed defensively, for a moment unsure of what was happening as Techno knelt in front of him. His ears rang and his entire body shook as he desperately tried to convince himself that this was real and he wasn't back in the nursery. Techno slowly reached down and took Tommy's hand in his own. He rubbed his hand across Tommy's forearm repeatedly and it was a strange enough sight that it caused Tommy's mind to stop reeling for a moment because seriously, what the fuck was Techno doing?

"Tommy? Tommy, can you hear me?" Techno's voice finally registered as the ringing in his ears faded away. Techno's hands moved to hover over his shoulders. "I'm here. I came back like I said. M'right here, kid."

Techno came back. Techno said he came back. Tommy had prayed that Techno would come back and save him in the nursery. Techno was sitting in front of him and gently wrapping him up in his arms. Tommy grasped at his brother's shirt, feeling the fabric in his hand rub between his fingers. Technoblade's long hair tickled his cheeks. He was real. His brother, who a decade ago had been the closest to saving him the night he'd been stolen, was holding him together and whispering assurances into his hair as Tommy tried to breathe.

"I've got you, Theseus," Techno murmured to him, rocking him ever so slightly in his hold. "You're gonna be okay. It'll take a while but you're gonna be okay."

It hurt so bad. He was finally home. He should be happy right? He should be over the goddamn moon! But he wasn't. Finally, Tommy choked out, "I-It sure does-doesn't feel...like it."

Techno nodded. “I know, but give it time. You’ve been through it, kid. Nobody expects you to just ‘be okay’ after what happened to you.”

“Toms, I’m gonna have to hold this on your back, you’re bleeding a bit, okay?” Phil said. Tommy nodded immediately into his brother’s chest, trying not to think about it.

“Just do it quick. Just-just...get it over with,” Tommy said, gritting his teeth. He felt his father start gently patting down his back with a towel and he winced at first, bracing for the sting of alcohol against his skin but found it wasn’t quite the burn he expected. Still, the feeling of anything on his stitches was enough to make him want to cry. “It h-hurts, Phil.”

“I know, I know. I’m sorry. It’s the saline stuff Bad gave me to clean it with. You’re almost done, just a bit more,” Phil assured him.

Tommy groaned into Techno’s chest. *Even with the pain medication this still sucks ass.* Maybe he should’ve taken the full dose after all.

“I have to put these patches on it and then we can wrap you up. This will sting at first but then you’ll feel a whole lot better,” Phil warned.

Tommy instantly tensed up as he asked, “W-What stuff? What is it?”

“Honey mixed with a health potion,” Phil explained with a soft voice.

Fucking what.

“The fuck? Wha—?” The confusion somehow managed to outweigh his fear as he asked, “Why the fuck? *Why?*”

He heard Phil chuckle as he began applying the patches. Tommy was so caught up in the weirdness of it that he hardly noticed the sting. Phil gently patted down another patch. “Helps with the

swelling and reduces the risk of infection. Now you know why Tubbo has his bee farm.”

He felt Techno chuckle at his still dumbfounded expression which he only dropped when he felt his back burn slightly at the sensation. Tommy winced but he could feel the anxiety and fear from earlier slowly drain away as his muscles relaxed and his heartbeat slowed. Once the patches were on, Phil wrapped new bandages around his torso. Finally, Phil sat back with a sigh.

“And done. It’s over,” Phil said and Tommy crumpled back into Techno’s chest, relieved.

“Yay...” Tommy cheered half-heartedly—near sardonically.

Phil shifted to face the two and gently brushed strands of hair from his eyes. Tommy let his eyes flutter shut at the soft touch. He heard his father hum, “It’s okay to hate me...or be mad at me. I wouldn’t blame you for it. I’m sorry we had to do that.”

Tommy squinted up at him unhappily and hissed, “Shut up. I don’t fuckin’ hate you and I’m not mad. I...I’m not anything really.”

There was a heavy silence at that at least until Techno shifted him into his hold and said, “I’m gonna put you on the couch, okay? I’m not goin’ anywhere though.”

Tommy just nodded and tried to relax as Techno picked him up and settled him in his arms. He was really glad his family seemed to be craving affection as much as he was because he had no idea how to ask for it himself. They just seemed to know. He supposed being notably absent for eleven years would explain the clinginess. Well, he damn well wouldn’t complain about it. After all, who knows how long it’ll last?

Tommy’s eyes drooped heavily as he snuggled himself further into Techno’s arms. He refused to sleep but perhaps resting his eyes for a while wouldn’t be a bad thing. After a while, however, he found himself dozing off, so he was quick to jolt himself awake. He looked over to see Wilbur staring at him from the other couch with a pained expression. Not jealousy...no it was something he’d continuously seen from his family since he’d woken up.

Tommy scrunched his nose as he half-growled half-whispered, “Quit starin’ at me like that...”

Wilbur's eyes crinkled, amused by his grumpiness. The man teased, resting his chin atop his palm. "Like what, hm?"

"Like I'm not gonna be here the next time you open your eyes." The tone stilled and suddenly there was no more humor to be found in Wil's face. Tommy felt the arm around his waist tighten ever so slightly and he knew Techno was awake as well. "M'not planning on taking another extended vacation any time soon."

"You're far too perceptive, you know that?" Wilbur rasped, wincing at the word 'vacation'.

"S'not perception. You just look like you're about to cry. Constantly." He felt Techno silently chuckle against him.

"I do not!" Wilbur hissed. His hand clenched around a throw pillow, ready to fire.

"You do too." Tommy grinned loopily.

"Oh, fuck off—"

"Boys..." Phil murmured from his armchair, peering over at his sons. He didn't look annoyed, just sleepy. "Be nice."

"I don't like it," Tommy said suddenly. Three sets of eyes that adored him were on him and Tommy caved beneath their weight. "I don't like that you believe I'm temporary."

Wilbur shot up from his spot and in an instant was knelt beside the couch. His hands clasped over Tommy's and Wilbur shook his head. "I'm sorry. I...I'm sorry..."

There was no denial of it so Tommy knew he'd hit the nail on the head. He felt Techno press his nose into his hair. Tommy hiccuped, and all of it bubbled to the surface once more. "I won't leave you. I promise. I-I'll fight harder this time, Wil."

“Thes...” Techno murmured and then Phil was by Wilbur’s side as well, grogginess be damned.

Wilbur tilted his head and leaned close to press his forehead against Tommy’s. His hand came up to thumb away unshed tears. “Tommy, no. You fought as hard as you could. You’ve fought from the moment you lost us till now. There’s no more reason to fight, blondie. You can finally rest.”

Tommy shook his head. “You can rest too then. If there’s no more fight then why won’t you? Why won’t any of you? You still think I’m a ghost, don’t you? All of you do. You never looked at me like this when I was just Tommy.”

“I’m sorry.” Wilbur crumpled and he heaved a sob, “I’m so sorry. I can’t help it. I’m so scared now that we have you back that we will lose you again. Forgive me.”

Tommy threw his arms around Wilbur’s neck and fell from Techno’s arms into Wilbur’s. His father caught him briefly to slowly guide him down before pulling away so Tommy could bury his face into his big brother’s shoulder. He didn’t cry. He’d shed his tears but the grief still wouldn’t go away. The pain wouldn’t stop. He would take the pain of his wings being ripped from his spine a thousand times over if it meant his family could be happy.

“Shut up. Shut the fuck up, you moron. I forgive you. I’ll always forgive you,” Tommy trembled. He had to remember not to squeeze too tight because otherwise, he’d be choking the man. “I’m not enough...Not without Mum. Mum could make us whole. I can’t...”

“Kid...” Techno murmured, he reached over to card his fingers through his hair. “Stop. You’re enough. You were always enough. Tommy was enough.”

Crow. He missed Crow so fucking badly. He wanted his constant back. He mourned his lifelong friend so deeply. It was a hole in his heart that would never be filled. She wasn’t a pet. She had never been a pet. She was his family. She had been the only thing he’d ever been truly sure that he loved and she was just *gone*.

And the fact that Crow had also been his mother? The grief was nearly unbearable. His chest felt tight and his words died in his throat. He sucked in a breath and let it sit in his chest till it burned.

Sadness—or perhaps grief—is a strange thing. It isn't a monster that latches onto you or a disease that can be cured. Grief is an ocean. Grief is the tide that washes over you and threatens to pull you out to an endless sea where you can float adrift for eternity or sink beneath its dark waves. Or...you can hold fast till the tide pulls out once more and leaves you on the sand, wondering if it's finally time to get up so you can no longer be washed away. Or you can walk back into the sea and rest with the bones that others before you left behind.

Tommy didn't feel like doing either of those options. He just wanted to lie there and sink into the sand for a little while. He just wanted to nap beneath the sun for the first time.

Finally, he choked out, "I want her back...I want Crow to come back." Tommy looked to his father whose melancholy seemed permanently etched into his eyes. He begged his father as if he had any control over it. But as a child, his parents had been magic. They'd been able to fix any problem he had. His worries had been soothed so quickly and his world had been perfect.

Well, now he had a problem. And his father was supposed to fix it, right? So he begged his father. His father, who was as human and as helpless as he. He begged a futile request to a man who sat at his bedside each night begging the gods who had done nothing but hurt him for his love back. He begged like the child he'd left behind. "I want her back, Dad. I want Mum."

Phil let out a sob and shook his head. Tommy's heart sank as he said, "I do too, my heart. I do too."

My heart. *You are my joy, my heart.* Crow was gone.

His mother was gone. And they all wept for her, even Wilbur. Wilbur who had directed all his anger towards her because he'd had nowhere else to place the blame. They all wept for the hole in their hearts they each shared. They all wept for Kristin.

And somewhere far off, she wept with them.

Eventually, the tears subsided and the pain tucked itself away for another day. Tommy found himself sitting in between his older brothers. His legs rested over Techno's lap while he leaned sideways into Wilbur's chest. Wilbur had his head against Techno's shoulder. They sat there in solidarity for they all shared the same empty feeling in their chest. Oh, to be motherless. A terrible thing.

Meanwhile, Phil claimed a spot apart from them, though not far. The avian sat across them with his wings draped over his shoulders that were hunched in wretched sadness that Tommy had resurfaced. Tommy wondered what it was like to be his father at that moment. His face was indiscernible, empty...heartbroken. Tommy might only be sixteen but he knew this much; to lose someone you loved with everything you are destroys you. To lose someone with whom you shared your soul, the loss must be unimaginable. His mother may have given their father back his life, but she had been unable to give him back his heart, for it had been hers in the first place.

Tommy tilted his head up to Wilbur who looked back at him with nothing other than love. His brother pressed a kiss to his hairline and Tommy prayed he would never experience that kind of loss.

“I wish I hadn’t been Theseus...” Tommy whispered into the dim lighting the fireplace gifted. “I wish he had stayed dead and I could’ve just been Tommy. At least then Crow might still be here and I could’ve still had you.”

“I don’t,” Techno said. “Even if it meant Crow was gone I’d want you as you are now.”

His face then paled momentarily and Techno quickly amended his words, “Obviously I wish we could’ve prevented what came after...but I wouldn’t change getting you back. Who we found in the tower is half of who you are, kid. He’s so different compared to what I see now. Crow wanted that for you. All she wanted was to make you whole again.”

Tommy shook his head confused. “What do you mean? ...I’ve *changed*?”

Wilbur nodded against his temple. “You have. You really have, Toms. We would’ve loved you in any form you’d come in, but I see Theseus when I look at you. I see Tommy. You’re more open now. You have a fight in you that I didn’t see before. The kid I met a week ago would not have dug into us today the way you did. I mean...you quite literally *growled* at us earlier.”

“You’ve been awake all of two hours and you’ve already insulted all of us more than once,” Techno pointed out.

Wilbur pulled back to look at him and smiled. “*You fight*. You’re letting yourself feel anger for the first time in a decade. You were too scared to be angry before. You say what you feel and soon I imagine you won’t feel bad about it. You’re *so* brave. You were always brave but now I think if you saw Chaos now you wouldn’t freeze or panic. You’d spit in his face and take his eye out.”

“To be fair, I did try to,” Tommy pointed out with a wince. “He threatened Techno so I nearly took his face off.”

Wilbur stared at him momentarily pained but then shoved it away with a laugh, “Theseus was a fighter. He was kind and loving but you were also a little bastard who loved to push buttons. Chaos took that from you and now you’ve taken it back.”

Tommy pondered his brother’s words for a long time, long enough that the fire had to be prodded back to life. At some point, he obtained a portion of Techno’s waist-length hair to play with. He weaved the strands together over and over till his fingers cramped. It was a familiar pastime that Tommy knew he’d done a million times before. Yet it felt ever so new to him. Eventually, Tommy sighed frustratedly, “I don’t feel different. I feel fuckin’ pissed off and sad.”

There was a moment of silence before he heard his father ask, “What can we do to help?”

He wasn’t sure. He didn’t even know how to help himself lest ask anyone else to help him. So instead he asked for the thing that had haunted him ever since Crow had flown through his tower window with it clamped in her talons, “Can I have my necklace back?”

Phil’s eyes sparkled at that. “I was waiting for you to ask. I didn’t want to return it until you felt ready.” His father reached into his pocket and pulled out his necklace, which he noted was no longer stained with his blood. He remembered when he was lying motionless on the floor in the nursery as his butchers tore away at him, he’d grabbed the gem in his bloodied hand and held onto it for comfort. He remembered red contrasting against the green of the emerald and thinking it quite ugly.

...He’d thought about a lot of things lying on that floor.

Tommy flinched, suddenly feeling nauseous again. His father hesitated. “You don’t have to take it now if you need more time. I can hold onto it as long as you need.”

Tommy shook his head and reached out his hand. Eventually, Phil deposited it into his palm and Tommy pulled it close. He didn’t dare look at it, because then he truly might lose whatever was left in his stomach. He clasped the chain around his neck and moved his hair out of the way.

There. It was done.

“Tell us what you’re thinking, Toms,” Wilbur asked, taking the necklace in his hand and thumbing the emerald thoughtfully.

Tommy wrinkled his nose. “Tell me what *you’re* thinking, Wilbur.”

The hybrid laughed dryly but then his voice softened as he answered, “I’m just worried about you, I suppose.”

“Pff...lame,” Tommy snorted and rolled his eyes. He crossed his arms smartly. “That’s a given.”

Wilbur shrugged. “It’s true though. I mean for one, holding you is like holding an ice cube, kid. Why are you so bloody cold all of the time?”

“My blood has more important things to do than to keep me warm. Besides, you and Tech are fuckin’ furnaces so who cares? What’s that about anyway?” Tommy asked.

Techno stirred and nudged Wilbur off his shoulder, who proceeded to huff offendedly at him. He looked to Tommy and replied, “It’s ‘cause we’re piglin hybrids—*don’t you dare start, Wilbur*—we’re just biologically warmer.”

Wilbur let out a gruff sound from the back of his throat, akin to a growl and Techno raised a brow at him with a low-sounding growl of his own, as if daring him to pick a fight. Tommy observed their interactions curiously. Wilbur might not like being a piglin hybrid, but he certainly still had moments where he acted like one. Tommy would’ve laughed if he knew already that Wil would not find it as funny.

“Well, my tiny, cold body appreciates it. Though not enough to keep me from doing this,” Tommy said and then mischievously pushed his freezing hand onto Wilbur’s bare arm. His brother screeched playfully and snatched his cold hands into his warm ones.

“Fuckin’ devil child!” Wilbur hissed while dramatically shivering. Tommy giggled and then nudged his equally cold feet to the back of Techno’s heel. The man jolted with a yelp and batted his foot away and back over his lap. He held the top of his knees to keep him from kicking at him again.

“I’m not above entrapping you in blankets, you Vitamin B12 deficient little shit.” Techno joked. Tommy was just about to take a swipe at him when suddenly his stomach growled loudly for all the kingdom to hear.

Tommy grabbed his stomach, embarrassed. “Whoops.”

“Feel like eatin’ something, yet?” Phil offered, already getting up from his chair. The man wobbled slightly and then grabbed a cane from his side that Tommy had never seen before.

Tommy forced a smile. “Yeah. I feel better now. Fuzzy, but better.”

Phil nodded. “Alright, I’ll go grab somethin’.”

“Wait! Can I go? I want to try walking again. Please?” Tommy asked, already attempting to push himself upright. The painkillers and health potion in his system made it much easier to move than before. He felt Techno wrap an arm around his front.

“Slow down, kid. I’d like to remind you that you are still *very much injured*.”

“I’d like to remind you that you’re very much a *bitch*. Walking is good for me. My legs are cramping from disuse. I’m practically withering away! C’mon—!” Tommy complained dramatically while trying to squirm out of his brother’s arms. Techno rolled his eyes and held him in place so he wouldn’t hurt himself but cracked a small smile only Tommy could pull from him.

Techno turned to Phil and shrugged. “If he gets tired, I can always carry him. *You* on the other hand are a bigger fall risk than he is. Sit down, old man. You’ve hit your limit.”

Wilbur sat up with a grin. “We’ll sick Puffy on you.”

Phil narrowed his eyes and pointed his cane threateningly at his eldest. “Fuck you.” He then shifted it towards Techno. “And fuck you.”

The twins chuckled but Tommy frowned, confused. “Wait...since when have you used a cane? I don’t remember you ever needing one before?”

The room went quiet and Tommy ducked his head, already regretting his question, at least till Phil gave him a sad sigh and explained, “It happens when I push myself a bit too far. I don’t normally need it. It’s uh...it’s phantom pain from the sword or some lingering side effect of being revived. It’s nothin’ to worry about, mate. I just get a bit wobbly and sore.”

Tommy froze but immediately Wilbur reminded him, “Not your fault, Toms. It’s no one’s fault, right Dad?”

“Absolutely nobody’s fault,” Phil instantly agreed. Tommy sighed and his eyes darkened while anger curled in his chest.

“Nobody except *his*. It was Dre—”

Techno placed a hand on his shoulder and interrupted, “Don’t say his name. He doesn’t deserve to have his name remembered. Not by you especially. Let him be forgotten. Let him *rot*.”

Tommy held his breath for a moment, tense. After a moment though, he nodded and let it drop altogether. His father had a cane. That was all that he needed to know.

The silence thankfully didn’t last long because suddenly his father was throwing him a red poncho-esque garb to put over his white tunic. It, like his other shirt that had been destroyed that night, had gold embroidery that lined the ends of the shirt. It took a moment to slowly hook his arms into it and over his head but Tommy smiled when it fit perfectly. It was soft and warm and Tommy loved it. The fine garb was clearly made for a...a prince.

Tommy smiled sheepishly at his father and squeaked out a thank you.

“We had a few outfits made for you while you were asleep. We eyeballed the sizing but that seems to fit you well. We have some new boots for you too. Your old ones were a size or two big on you,” Phil explained.

Well, they weren't mine to begin with. Tommy thought spitefully to himself. He reached down his shirt to fish out his necklace so it could hang where it belonged, out for all to see.

“You didn't have to but I really appreciate it.”

Phil quirked his head at him curiously and then his eyes softened. “Course we did. You didn't have any other clothes other than the ones you came here in.”

Oh, right. Fair enough.

Phil came over and reached out his hands to the teen. “Ready to try and stand?”

He heard Techno click his tongue disapprovingly and climb to his feet. “Not a chance, sit down, fall risk.”

“*Would you stop calling me that –*” Phil squawked as he batted away his hands futilely. Tommy giggled as he watched his father be practically manhandled into a chair. Phil glared at the man and hissed, “Prick.”

“Fossil,” Techno retorted but Tommy didn't miss how he still squeezed their father's hand. He felt Wilbur nudge him in the side. Tommy turned.

“Ready, kid?” Wilbur asked and Tommy nodded eagerly with a grin. He was so *ready* to stretch out his limbs, wobbliness be damned. His brother came forward to hook an arm beneath Tommy's shoulder and slowly pulled the boy to his feet. Wilbur's hand came up to hover over his stomach rather than his back as a safety measure in case he fell, meanwhile, his other hand loosely gripped his shoulder. A brief wave of dizziness rushed over him as soon as he stood firm on his feet and he wobbled a moment as he waited for it to pass.

“Slowly,” Wilbur said, holding him steady while Tommy’s vision danced.

Tommy leaned his face into Wilbur’s shoulder and breathed out a laugh, “Primes, that is some strong medicine you got there, Philza Minecraft.”

He heard his father chuckle nervously and then ask, “You sure you’re ready to get up? You shouldn’t strain your—”

"If I'm on my ass any longer, I'm gonna start biting ankles," Tommy threatened and opened his eyes.

“Okay then,” Phil yielded, hands raised in surrender.

Tommy squinted his eyes, focusing himself on staying upright. His legs weren’t as shaky as before and he didn’t feel nearly as winded as he had earlier. He righted himself and slowly took a step towards Techno. When his knees didn’t buckle immediately he gave him a shit-eating grin and declared aloud, “M’fuckin’ mobile, lads.”

“Gods help us all,” Techno chuckled, still looking slightly wary at his stance. Tommy wobbled a bit as he took a few more baby steps but eventually felt his creaky limbs loosen up. He sighed in relief at the feeling. Wilbur slowly retracted his hands, allowing Tommy a bit more freedom to stretch himself. He was careful to keep his back still, despite the way it cramped. “Look at you, kid. You’ll be running laps around us in no time,” Techno praised.

“Damn right,” Tommy huffed. He squatted slowly to grab his new boots and batted away his brothers when they tried to help him. After a few frustrating attempts, he managed to get them on and by then he felt more than capable of walking for a bit. There was still a lingering weakness and wooziness, but he trusted neither Wilbur nor Techno was about to let him fall. He turned to Phil and grinned wide. “Look at me, Philza Minecraft, I’m practically a pro again already. You should be proud.”

Phil smiled, pure and genuine. “I am. I am very proud of you, Theseus.”

Tommy swallowed harshly, taken back a bit, but didn't falter more than that as he tried to keep his energy up. He nodded to his father and then tried not to let his voice crack as he asked, "Can we go eat now?"

"We're just waiting on you, kid," Wilbur teased, rolling his eyes and Tommy felt the familiar urge to kick him. Lucky for him his balance wasn't the best right now.

He was about to turn to leave when suddenly Phil called, "*Wait*. Hold on a second." Tommy frowned at the slight anxiety just hinting in his tone. He turned stiffly to see Phil pulling himself up from his chair and hurriedly walking over to him. The next thing he knew he was being pulled into a hug.

"*Oh-*" Tommy gasped, startled for a moment before he relaxed into it. He pressed his nose into his father's shoulder for a long moment before pulling back with a confused expression.

Phil ducked his head meekly and apologized, "Sorry. I just..."

Tommy shook his head and tucked himself back into his father's arms. "Nah. I get it. I think I...no—I *know* I missed this."

Phil's breath hitched in his throat and then he let out a choked laugh as he held the back of his head gently, "Primes kid, you're gonna make me cry *again*. I'm getting dehydrated at this point."

Tommy chuckled, "Sorry, Papa."

"*Tommy...*" Phil complained and Tommy broke into soft laughter which quickly Phil joined in on. Finally, Tommy pulled away and Phil snuck a final kiss to the top of his head before he ushered the three of them out, "Alright go, get out of here you three, before you cause me more emotional trauma."

Wilbur faked a tearful frown as he opened the door for his brothers and turned to Phil. "No hugs for me, Dad? Your dearest eldest son?"

Phil snorted and flipped him off. “My dearest pain-in-the-ass more like. I love you all dearly, now get the hell out.”

Wilbur snickered and shut the door behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Bless you all and your infinite patience. I know updates from me have gotten scarcer but I promise its not from me giving up on the fic or anything. I've been slammed at work, went on vacation with my family and then slammed at work AGAIN so I've had a very busy two months. I'm going back to sleep to recover from my 3 back to back 12 hr shifts but I love you all and I hope you enjoyed the tangled boys:3 I hope to start writing more and doing art again soon. I miss it:(

I'll see you lovelies in the next chapter<3

If you liked this chapter, consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also, you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you like art for TGP consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I'm also on Twitter, Tumblr, Tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

You'll See My Face in Every Place

Chapter Notes

Hey what happened while I was gone---oH
sigh. cant have shit in this house

lets just keep going
fuck cc!wilbur. tgp!wilbur is my own darling and hed clock cc!wilbur on the spot with tubbo's
gun in a heartbeat while everyone cheered. tgp!tntduo is mine too. i didn't slowburn this hard
for fuckin nothin

TW: None unless you count Wilbur which you should expect sorry.

This chapter was beta-read by my lovely @arbitersart <3

Word Count: 8.5k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You didn’t answer my question earlier,” Wilbur said as they headed down to the kitchen, slowly enough that Tommy didn’t struggle too much to follow. Tommy’s eyes darted around the empty hallway for a moment before landing on his brother.

“Hm?” he hummed, distracted by the absence of guards. Techno had said they were trying to keep him out of sight to prevent rumors from spreading farther than they already had but Tommy guessed that they obviously wouldn’t allow the three princes to walk around a recently broken into castle completely unguarded. There had to be a guard around somewhere. The fact they were probably hiding made him shudder uncomfortably. Suddenly, Techno nudged him in the side, pulling him from his thoughts. He jolted slightly. “Oh! Sorry. Uh...what was the question?”

“What are you thinking right now?” Wilbur asked. Tommy hummed discontently.

“I thought we were leaving the deep emotional shit in the Library.” Tommy frowned when heard Techno chuckle.

Wilbur leaned forward with a flashy grin and teased. “Nope. Nowhere is safe from emotional healing and growth.”

“No wonder you keep running from it,” Techno said, flatly.

Tommy choked on his next sentence and then busted into laughter while Wilbur glared at his twin. Techno simply shrugged and asked, “Too soon?”

“You didn’t need to do him like that,” Tommy wheezed, holding his stomach. His back ached but he couldn’t have cared less as he sputtered, “He was unarmed.”

“Sorry, Chat made me. Couldn’t help it,” Techno explained with a small smile.

“That was *so* out of pocket,” Wilbur growled and Techno nodded, patting his twin on the shoulder. Wilbur looked to Tommy who was still trying to catch his breath and frowned. “Not funny.”

“Very funny. The funniest actually,” Tommy coughed and Wilbur helped him upright as he wobbled slightly. Tommy wiped his eyes. “Absolutely hilarious and definitely deserved.”

“*Hmph*,” Wilbur huffed in discontent and then gave a small smile. “Alright, alright, *moving on*—or rather *moving back* to the prior topic—”

“Still trying to pick my brain, ey?” Tommy asked, rolling his eyes half-heartedly.

“Adamently, little brother,” Wilbur said, suddenly genuine. Tommy felt his heart ache for a moment before the feeling grew warm and comforting. He really was their little brother, wasn’t he? That was real. This is real.

“Fine, fine. I yield,” Tommy relented and Wilbur grinned triumphantly. Tommy scoffed when the man pumped his fist. “Fuckin’ weirdo.”

“I’m thinking…” Tommy began. He searched his thoughts and feelings for a moment as his brothers paused for him. Tommy chewed the inside of his cheek as he realized, “I’m thinking… about Crow, mostly. I miss my bird, not just Mum, but the only friend I had for a decade. I’m thinking… about my wings… about what I’ve lost. I’m thinking about the feather of mine that I left in the bathroom sink the morning of my birthday. I wonder if it’s still there. I’m thinking about the

way my wings left scorch marks on your floorboards and burst into flames the moment I realized who I was.”

“Uh—”

“*They what...?!*”

Tommy shook his head. “I’m thinking...no I’m hearing my wings snap in his hands...over and over...and yet despite everything. I miss my tower. Isn’t that awful?”

The realization had struck him as he spoke. Tommy wanted to wilt. How fucking awful was he to miss the place where he’d known nothing other than *so much hurt*? What kind of freak was he? He didn’t miss Chaos...no...his brother could rot. He never wanted to breathe his name again much less miss it—miss *him*. Never. Fuck Dream.

But the tower...

“I will never feel safe there ever again but I miss the warm stone beneath my feet and the smell of flowers in my window. I will never go back home to explore the pond by the tower that I stared at everyday of my life,” Tommy’s voice wavered as he looked up. “It’s gone. It’s all gone and I never want to see it again. But I would give anything to play my shitty piano with Crow on my shoulder just *one more time* .”

The twins had grown silent with only Techno meeting Tommy’s gaze. His eyes were rueful and yet Tommy could see that he understood. Techno stepped forward and pressed a hand beneath his chin thoughtfully as he said, “Thank you for telling us.”

And for a moment, Tommy thought that’d be it. And then Wilbur finally spoke.

“There..there was a day...that I missed it...” Wilbur began from behind the two, his eyes glued to the floor. “It wasn’t for very long...only a moment, really. It was a few months after Phil found us and our first winter had blown in. The coldest in decades. People running out of firewood and freezing in their homes kind of bad. I remember freezing beneath a pile of blankets with Techno and just clutching onto him while Mum and Dad fretted over us. Techno and I weren’t made for the cold. It took a long time to adjust the way we have here. But just for that one moment as my body shook against my will and my twin clung onto me for warmth I just remember missing the broiling heat of the Nether. Not the box...not that...just the heat. It disgusted me for a long time, to the

point I tried to force myself to like the cold. But eventually, I realized that it's okay to miss the small comforts of what was once your misery. Your tower...it's okay to miss it. It's okay to miss the parts that comforted you. The good memories in between the bad ones."

"And..." Wilbur cleared his throat. "Crow to you was what Techno was to me in the Nether. Your constant. Your comfort. I have never known a life without my twin and you have never known one without Crow. You just lost your best friend. You are allowed to be devastated about it, Tommy."

"I know," Tommy said simply and then he smiled sadly. "I am."

"And I'm sorry," Wilbur breathed. He looked up at him. "I'm so sorry, Theseus."

Tommy shrugged. "It's not like you didn't lose her as well. She's your mum too."

Wilbur just nodded stiffly causing Tommy to frown. Tommy saw Techno look at his twin with an exasperated expression from behind him.

"I'm afraid," Tommy admitted and then chuckled to himself. "I suppose that isn't really new. I've always been afraid. I've only recently started remembering times when I wasn't—of course, but that's beside the point. I'm afraid to sleep. I'm afraid to do anything by myself— *hell I'm afraid to be by myself*. I'm fucking terrified he's gonna come back for me. I'm scared my powers are gone. It feels like I'm scared to fucking breathe. And I'm afraid that I'll never stop being afraid which I think should go on a list for 'The World's Dumbest Fears'."

"It's not dumb," Wilbur assured in that stupid comforting voice he did that made Tommy feel so stupidly safe. Asshole.

"I think it is," Tommy retorted.

"Tommy—"

"I think my name should go right on the front page. We can flip a coin on which one—"

“Tommy.”

“Or maybe both? Behold! Prince Theseus...uh something?...Watson...or Tommy! The Wingless Lost Prince! Ranked number one in being an absolute fuckin’ pussy—”

“*Theseus—*”

“*What?*” Tommy snapped harshly. “What the fuck is it, Wilbur?” Wilbur clamped his mouth shut, his response lost. A twang of guilt struck him but Tommy decided to let the feeling rot in his chest.

“Let's just go. I’m fuckin’ hungry.” Tommy moved ahead before looking to his brothers and calling out, “Hurry up but don’t you twats outpace me. I’m on drugs!”

“Wait, are we seriously not going to talk about the wings bursting into flames or—” Techno sputtered.

“*Nope!*” Tommy declared, trying to not trip. “Now tell me, what was my favorite color?”

“Heh?” Techno laughed, bewildered.

“You said I could ask anything, right? Back in the Library? What was my favorite color when I was little? Can’t remember,” Tommy said smoothly and then pointed at his head jokingly. “Remember? Mush brain?”

Tommy giggled when Techno swatted at him.

“It was red. You always wore red as a kid,” Wilbur answered and Tommy wrinkled his nose. Sure it was the color that looked best on him but...

“I like blue,” Tommy proclaimed earning a humorous glance. He hummed in thought for a moment and then asked Wilbur, “Your favorite color...it was teal, right?”

Wilbur beamed. “Still is.”

Tommy turned to Techno and then guessed, “Yours was blue too.”

“Correct,” Techno praised and then snorted humorously. “Lots of variety in our answers, well done.”

Warmth swelled in his chest and Tommy let out a small chuckle. He tried another question about himself, curious to see what changed and what stayed the same. “Was I always vegetarian?”

“Mhm,” Wilbur hummed in response. “We tried to get you to eat meat once when you were maybe two and you started crying because you thought it was Henry’s family. Never again after that.”

“Henry was the cow plush in the Nursery. I saw him on the bed when I...” Tommy trailed off, nearly robotically while quickly skimming over the way his brothers tensed. “Sam gave him to me.”

“You loved cows. You told me you wanted to go find a Mooshroom when you were older,” Wilbur said, eyes glossed over fondly. “I remember Puffy telling you stories about them from her pirate days.”

Puffy. Tommy frowned. “Who’s Puffy?” The name meant nothing to him. It felt like slamming into a wall. He could feel the answer was there in his head but he had no way to resurface it. He saw the way Wilbur and Techno’s faces fell and gathered she was rather special. *Damn it.*

It was Techno who cleared his throat to answer, “Captain Puffy. She’s the Captain of the Royal Guard and one of our parents’ oldest friends. She’s also our godmother. Before our father awoke from his coma, it was her, our Mom, and several other council members who ran the kingdom while they waited for the Angel of Death to wake up. ”

Tommy winced and pinched the bridge of his nose. Still nothing. He sighed. “Guess I’ll just have to take your word for it till I meet her myself. That’s quite a big blank in my memory.”

“Don’t beat yourself up over it. It’ll come back, just takes time.” Techno nudged him.

“An *annoying* amount of time,” Tommy shot back, scowling at the older man.

“Well, you’ve only been awake a couple of hours.”

Tommy huffed, impatiently. He was about to ask more when all of a sudden, someone yelled from around the corner close to the kitchen. “Prince Technoblade? Is that your voice I’m hearing?”

Tommy immediately ducked behind Techno like a child might cling to a parent’s leg. Techno reached back to take his hand and his shoulders relaxed as he called back, “No, this is Wilbur.”

Wilbur snorted.

“All due respect, I don’t remember his Highness having your mother’s accent. Nor do I remember his balls dropping that low,” The man replied.

“Go fuck yourself, Ted!” Wilbur hissed, earning a laugh.

Ted? Tommy wracked his brain searching for a face to pin to the name. He got nothing so Tommy dug in his heels and hissed, “Who is that?”

Wilbur’s gaze softened and he quickly soothed him, “He’s just a friend. He’s a guard. You knew him before though you probably don’t remember him. And I think...I think someone is with—”

“Well, well, look who’s finally out of bed,” A familiar voice drawled and Tommy peeked behind his brother to see Schlatt walking side by side with a guard. The man was peering at him curiously, though Tommy could see relief as well in his eyes. Schlatt winked at him. “Hello, nephew.”

Schlatt. Tubbo's father. His father's best friend and advisor. The man Phil referred to as his brother. His godfather and the last person he'd seen before he'd been snatched away. He may not remember Puffy, but he definitely remembered Jschlatt. Tommy winced as he also recalled George's arrow shooting through him.

"Ayup...M'lord?" Tommy mumbled under his breath, testing out the titles that he only now remembered. And to think no one questioned him not calling Philza 'His Majesty'. Though...wait was he supposed to use titles on those lower in status if he was a prince? Or maybe this was too casual a setting to call his uncle by his proper title?

Admittedly, four-year-old Theseus' royal etiquette was rather rusty.

Fuck this shit is complicated.

Schlatt tilted his head and raised a brow. "M'lord, really? Oh come now, where's your ire, kid? You weren't afraid of me last time we met."

Tommy swallowed and his voice was small as he replied, "I think you'd find I was a very different person last we met."

"That you were," Schlatt fired back. "But you were never shy, Theseus."

Tommy winced at his name, still finding a sting to it. He gritted his teeth and asked haughtily, "How's your shoulder? Thought that arrow did you in."

Something soft and guilt-ridden flitted across the brunette's expression. It quickly vanished and his uncle raised his hands with a shrug. "Enough happened that night so I couldn't be bothered to add my death to the mix. I'm still here, aren't I? And look at you, Lost Prince, it seems you've wandered your way home."

"*Schlatt*," Techno warned but the man held up a hand in surrender.

Schlatt came to stand before him and Tommy hated that he had to look up. He really needed that second growth spurt to hurry the hell up. Schlatt had been his father's anchor after he and his mother disappeared, and for that, he was forever grateful. His uncle smiled and placed a hand on his shoulder, affectionately. "Welcome home."

Tommy smiled and clapped a hand over his warmly. "Yeah, yeah. I'm glad you're not dead...I guess."

Schlatt barked a laugh. "You guess?"

"Jury's still out," Tommy teased and the atmosphere finally settled into something comfortable and light.

"You grew up well. Maybe even a little too well. Too much like your father," Schlatt snorted.

"Explains why you totally recognized me," Tommy retorted, raising a brow.

Schlatt barked a laugh and ruffled his hair. "Nevermind. That sass is all your mother."

A sense of pride swirled in his chest at that. Schlatt fished a flask from his pocket and took a swig. Tommy's nose wrinkled at the bitter smell. He handed it to the guard next to him who took it but didn't drink, instead, he eyed him fondly. The man was tall and stocky with short brown hair and glasses. He smiled at him. "Schlatt was right. You look more like your mom than most people would notice at first."

Tommy decided then and there that he liked Ted.

"Most people just say I look like Phil," Tommy pointed out. Not that he had any problem with that.

Ted shrugged. "True. But you've got your mother's smile. Mommy Issues over there does too but he'd never admit it."

“I’m going to fire you, Ted,” Wilbur growled. “I know where your employment papers are. Don’t call me that.”

“You can always take back your order for me to treat you like normal in private, your Highness,” Ted smirked.

“You’d somehow find a way to be even more agitating that way,” Wilbur said, gritting his teeth.

Ted clapped the prince on the shoulder with a grin but Tommy saw a brief apology in his eye. He turned to Tommy and then guessed, “I gather you don’t remember me do you, little prince? Though I suppose I can’t call you ‘little’ anymore can I, your Highness?”

Tommy twitched at the title. He had to get over that at some point but he didn’t feel like doing it today. “Just Tommy is fine and no, sorry. I wish I could say I did.”

Ted smiled sadly for a moment. “Don’t worry about it. That just means I can make myself look better when I tell stories about you.” Tommy let out a light laugh and Ted reached out to shake his hand. It took a second to recognize what Sam had taught him but then he shook it back warmly. Ted gave the boy a slight bow and said, “I’m truly happy to see you again, Tommy. These halls have been without the sun for a long time now.”

With that Ted pulled away and looked to Techno to report, “I’ve got the order from His Majesty to clear the kitchen for awhile so nobody should see him. Although I do have one member unaccounted for...unsurprisingly.”

Tommy saw Wilbur’s face light up as he grinned. “Couldn’t catch Charlie, could you?”

Ted snorted while shaking his head in amusement and slight jealousy. “Course not. I swear that kid knows this castle better than I do. He’d ducked into one of his little hidden passages long before I could catch him.”

“What would my father say if he learned one of his most faithful and skilled kingsmen was being outsmarted by an eight-year-old?” Wilbur tutted in mock shock.

Ted threw his head back with a laugh and replied, "He'd pardon me if he knew it was Charlie. Now if you'll excuse me, my princes, I have a certain Captain awaiting my report. Rest assured my men are nearby should anything happen."

"Before you go, what do the guards know so far about Tommy?" Techno asked and Tommy's head perked up curiously.

Ted paused and straightened his stance as he turned to the older prince. His voice grew professional, no longer carrying the same jovial tone as before. "Only that nobody is permitted to speak with him or get within his sight unless absolutely necessary. They have strict orders from Puffy to say nothing of his presence and have not been informed of his identity. But your Highness..." Ted paused and bowed his head as he cautioned, "The news of his return will break one way or another and *soon*. I've heard whispers already amongst the staff. There is talk in the village as well. With Tommy's safety being considered as high a priority as yourself...it won't be long till they put the pieces together."

Techno pondered his words for a moment and then eyed his little brother softly. Tommy could see in that moment just how far Technoblade would go to keep him safe. Techno rubbed his chin thoughtfully before finally replying, "On pain of treason, no one is permitted to breathe a word of his existence. Make that absolutely clear, Ted. As far as I'm concerned his life and safety are to be placed above mine."

Uh, hell no.

"And mine," Wilbur added and Tommy felt the urge to scream. Wilbur fished out a piece of paper and a strange-looking ink pen to hand to Ted. "When the lockdown ends tomorrow, a statement is to be made publically from me specifically, 'To my father's loyal citizens, we ask that you forgive the sudden shutdown since my brother's festival and we thank you humbly for your endless patience during this confusing time. Rest assured your Emperor and his heirs are well...' Wilbur winced at the word and then amended, "...his heirs are in good health..."

"Don't mention the attack," Techno added. "No one needs to doubt the castle's defenses. It sows doubt for their own safety. Don't say good health either, that's a lie."

"Do you have a better word that doesn't make us look like targets?" Wilbur argued, though it was no longer in brotherly jest, it was a debate between experts. Experienced strategists who had been doing this for years. He saw Schlatt eye the twins with pride. Techno cringed as he drew a blank.

But Tommy didn't. "Appropriate. That's vague enough right?" Tommy contributed meekly. Wilbur's eyes brightened at his participation.

"Appropriate is vague enough to not draw attention to but it's odd wording," Wilbur gently critiqued. "Appropriate health'. It sounds off, as if purposefully placed."

"Isn't it, though?" Tommy asked.

"The point is to avoid that. What else you got?" Techno encouraged and Tommy hummed, thumbing through synonyms in his mind. If he'd looked up at that moment he would've seen the pride in his brothers' eyes.

"Apt? Apt health?" Tommy tried and Wilbur snapped his fingers at the word as if it was the last piece of a puzzle.

"Perfect. Thank you, Tommy," Wilbur praised and then continued brainstorming while thoughtlessly pacing in a short line, "...his heirs are in apt health and ask for your continued patience and respect for their privacy during this time. Rest assured, his Majesty will address and put to rest any rumors that have been speculated in our absence."

"Omit 'put to rest'," Schlatt interjected as well, his arms crossed. He quirked his head toward Tommy. "Most likely what they are speculating is correct."

"How long do we have till we have to tell them about me?" Tommy asked shakily.

Wilbur was quick to calm him, "As long as we can afford. Even when we do announce it you don't have to be there—"

"He will, Wilbur," Schlatt pointed out and Tommy swallowed harshly. "He'll have to at least make one appearance to prove it. The public needs to at least *see* Theseus. Otherwise, it'll create doubt throughout the Empire."

Wilbur stepped in front of him, shielding him slightly as he growled, “The public can think whatever the fuck they want! I’m not subjecting him to that!”

Schlatt sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation. Finally, he threw up his hands. “We can discuss this later with your father. I’m not going to be the bad guy in this argument. I don’t want him to force him into that role any more than you do. The priority right now is his safety.”

“I’ll do it,” Tommy said suddenly and cringed as four sets of eyes landed on him. He shifted uncomfortably. “...If you really need me too, I’ll do it.”

“No,” Techno refused gruffly, rubbing his temple as if he were nursing a particularly annoying headache. Tommy opened his mouth to object but Techno quickly cut him off, “*No, Tommy*. You woke up *hours* ago. You’re still hurt. You almost died a few days ago. I will not let you do this. You don’t even want to do this! You just want to appease us and I *refuse* to let anyone use you ever again.”

Techno jerked his head up to meet Schlatt’s gaze. Ire struck ire as Techno growled, “This is not up for debate, Schlatt. There is no decision to be made here. My answer is *no*. ”

“I am not the bad guy here, son. I’m just trying to be logical about this,” Schlatt’s voice was calm and steady. Tommy could almost say he sounded nervous.

Techno sneered darkly. “Fuck your logic.”

Tommy pushed past Wilbur and stepped between the two. Immediately, Techno’s near-murderous stance slackened as he looked down at Tommy. Tommy pressed his hand to Techno’s chest and gently pushed him back. It was like trying to move a brick wall but it got his point across as he demanded, “Enough. Stop it.”

Techno huffed in anger as he glared at Schlatt but ultimately he backed off. Schlatt shot him a grateful look as he too took a step back. It was then Wilbur decided, “C’mon, Toms, let’s go get you something to eat. Tech, you too. You’re a grouch when you’re hungry.”

As Wilbur passed by his uncle he stopped to say sharply, “You can tell Dad what you want, but I promise you this is not a fight you want to pick with us.”

“No, it’s not. I’m just trying to do what’s best for the Empire, Wil,” Schlatt explained and Wilbur’s eyes hardened.

“Try doing what’s best for your family first,” Wilbur spat before stalking off. He only stopped when he realized Tommy wasn’t following. He called to the boy, “Tommy?”

“One second,” Tommy answered and then turned to his uncle who looked rather tired.

“I swear I’m not trying to hurt you or do anything you wouldn’t want to. I’m just trying to make this as smooth a transition for all of us as I can,” Schlatt explained and Tommy nodded.

“I know. I’m not mad at you. I get what you’re trying to do.” Tommy dropped his head in frustration. “No one else will see it that way though.”

Schlatt shook his head and let out a dry laugh, “Phil would rip my head off. I know I won’t win this argument but I had to bring it up at least once. But Theseus?”

Tommy looked up at his uncle who clamped a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it gently. “You have a say in all of this. You may not believe it but once you’ve had time—we’ve all had time—to recover, I think you’ll do incredibly as our prince. You’re a smart kid. And you are your mother’s son.”

And then Schlatt leaned forward to whisper in his ear, soft enough that his brothers’ freaky hybrid hearing wouldn’t pick up on it. “Techno and Wilbur will coddle you forever if you let them. So will Phil. Don’t let them treat you like some precious jewel. Your family loves you more than anything and I promise they would never do anything to intentionally hurt you, but this palace can be a cage if you let it be. Your wings may be gone but you are not some flightless bird. Do you understand what I’m telling you?”

Tommy nodded, grateful for his advice. He shifted on his feet, feeling his legs shake a bit from exhaustion. Schlatt pulled away but Tommy grabbed his sleeve. He had to ask. “Tubbo...is he?”

Another squeeze to his shoulder. Schlatt tilted his head down and sighed. "I talked to him this morning. He's...not been handling things well. He's drowning himself in guilt and I don't know how to pull him out of it. But...he said he'd come to talk to you, whether it's today or next week...I couldn't say. Regardless, I'm pulling his ass out of that lab tonight so he at least is where I can keep an eye on him."

Tommy deflated at that. He shook his head. "Without Tubbo, I never would've figured out who I was in time. I think I'd be dead without him. If I hadn't known what he'd done...*Dre-Chaos* might've manipulated me into going back to the tower with him. I wouldn't be standing here if it weren't for Tubbo."

"He doesn't want you to forgive him," Schlatt frowned. "He blames himself for the loss of your wings."

Tommy rubbed his eyes and huffed out a sigh. He eyed his brothers who were standing at the entrance to the kitchen and frowned. He looked at Schlatt and said frustratedly, "You are all so infuriatingly self-loathing. It's exhausting."

Schlatt gave a tight-lipped smile and shrugged. "From what I've heard, you are no better."

Tommy side-eyed him and flipped him off, "Fuck off."

The ram snorted and then nudged him towards the kitchen. "Go eat something, child. I'll keep an eye on Tubbo."

He nodded appreciatively and slowly began limping towards his brothers. Techno eyed him worriedly and immediately offered to carry him. Tommy scowled. "I can walk just fine."

"Yes, because you look so incredibly steady," Wilbur said while returning the look. Tommy huffed in annoyance.

"If I fall, I fall. I highly doubt I'd hit the ground anyway," Tommy said, knowing the twins would easily scramble to catch him. Tommy adjusted his stance to support his weight. He suppressed the way his legs shook the best he could and continued blindly onward, realizing pretty quickly that he had no clue where the kitchen was. He trusted his stomach however to help him find out.

Even so, the twins easily outmatched his pace to guide him. It wasn't long before his nose was guiding him the rest of the way. Despite the cramping in his legs and back, he eagerly attempted to dart ahead, his stomach growling.

"Careful kid. Don't overdo it," Techno warned.

Tommy ignored him and kept going. He grinned to himself when he heard Wilbur sigh behind him. He caught himself on the edge of the doorframe and poked his head into the kitchen, relieved when he found it empty.

Or so he thought. The moment he stepped inside he saw something small skitter beneath the table and he shrieked on impulse, causing his brothers to call out his name in concern. The movement halted and then something bumped harshly from underneath the table and a voice whined out, "Ow..."

Immediately, Tommy relaxed and grinned. "Charlie?"

"My head..." Charlie rubbed at his hair as he poked out from beneath the table. His tiny voice wobbled, "That hurt..."

"C'mon, let's see." Tommy knelt down beside the table and held out his arms. There was a flash of lime green and Tommy grunted slightly as Charlie barreled into his chest.

"You're okay!" Charlie exclaimed, briefly forgetting the small head trauma he'd received via table. His arms wrapped tightly around his neck and it reminded him of the way Theseus— *his subconscious?*— had hugged him before he'd woken up. Charlie tucked his face into his shoulder. "Quackity told me you got hurt...I was worried."

Tommy smiled and hugged him back, the mild discomfort brought by the tight squeeze of small arms was easily overlooked. "Course I am! Takes a lot more than some pair of assholes to take me out."

Charlie pulled back with a sniff and Tommy frowned at the scratch mark just below his hairline. Charlie however no longer seemed too fussed about it as he apologized, “I’m sorry about your wings, Tommy. They were really pretty.”

“Yeah...they were,” Tommy whispered painfully. Tears caught in his throat but he quickly swallowed them down and gave a weak attempt at a smile. “But y’know what? That’s okay. Being wingless is just as cool.”

“But–” Charlie began but Tommy cut him off quickly.

“Let’s get that scratch fixed up the old-fashioned way. You got a med kit?”

Charlie nodded and then darted off to retrieve it. Tommy sighed and grabbed the edge of the table to help himself off the ground. He struggled for a moment, but thankfully all those years of scaling up his walls in the tower did him well and he was able to get on his feet long before his brothers could help him.

“Oh so he lets you hug him after knowing him a couple of days– *but me on the other hand*,” Wilbur huffed, jokingly offended, from the doorway. He sighed and strode over to the cabinet to fish out ingredients for a few sandwiches.

“I thought Quackity said you weren’t allowed to cook in his kitchen,” Techno questioned with a small grin.

“I’m making sandwiches not a fuckin’ three-course meal, what Q doesn’t know won’t kill him.” And then Wilbur turned to threaten, “Not a *word* .”

“Of course, I wouldn’t dream of ruining the marital bliss,” Techno teased causing Wilbur to chuck lettuce at him. Tommy giggled and hopped up to sit on the table, giving his legs a well-deserved break. Wilbur flipped off his twin and for a moment Tommy could tell he was debating throwing his sandwich at his twin as well, alas he didn’t and begrudgingly handed the man a ham sandwich.

Techno eyed it in horror and gasped, “ *Bruh*. ”

Wilbur gave Tommy a veggie sandwich before taking a bite out of what looked to be a turkey sandwich, then he grinned. “ *Eat shit.* ”

“Asshole,” Techno huffed and chucked it in the bin. He started rummaging through cabinets to make his own snack as Wilbur hopped up to sit next to Tommy.

“I found it!” A voice called out and Tommy turned to see Charlie running back into the kitchen with a white box clutched against his chest. Tommy took the last bite of his sandwich that he’d practically inhaled as Charlie handed him the box. He set it down beside him to let Charlie pull himself rather ungracefully onto the table that was just slightly too tall for him. Not that it stopped him.

Tommy dug through the box to pull some bandaids and other materials before pulling his legs under him to sit crisscrossed facing Charlie. He had to try it at least once. Just once before he could finally accept it. Tommy placed his thumb over the small scratch and tried, *tried so fucking hard*, to let his powers surge to his fingertips. A tiny whimper caught in his throat when nothing happened. And it wasn’t that he was too weak to summon it.

There was nothing there.

No power at all, just a hollow space in his heart where the golden power had once resided. It was gone. His powers were gone. And he had to accept that, not tomorrow, not next week, *now*. Because he really did not want to start crying in front of Charlie. The kid didn’t need to see him fall apart over that. So Tommy took a shaky breath and pulled his hand back to grab some gauze.

The room was deathly silent and Tommy knew if he turned he’d see his brothers looking at him sorrowfully as they came to the same conclusion he had. The quiet was crushing him as he cleaned the scratch and his voice rasped as he asked, “Wil, I need you to talk about something, *anything* .”

Wilbur was quick to come to his rescue. “You and Quackity went to the market today right, Charlie? How was that?”

Charlie’s expression fluctuated worriedly but he seemed to understand well enough what was happening so he replied as cheerfully as he could, “It was good, for the most part! We got a lot of ingredients so it took a few trips, but I got a sweet...kinda.”

“Kinda? Was it from Niki’s?” Techno asked.

Charlie shook his head, and Tommy chided him to hold still. “No, it was from some old guy that came up to us while we were shopping. He was weird but nice! He gave me candy! But as soon as he left Quackity made me toss it.”

Wilbur shifted nervously and nodded his head. “He was smart to do that. You shouldn’t take candy from strangers.”

Charlie frowned but nodded. “After that Quackity gave me some stuff to take back and told me to hurry home...I got about halfway when the old man came back.”

The twins stiffened and Charlie ducked his head guiltily. Techno coughed, “He didn’t hurt you did he?”

“No...he offered to help me carry my bags back,” Charlie tried to duck closer to Tommy as he secured a small bandage to his forehead.

“Charlie...please tell me you said no and ran.” Wilbur pinched the bridge of his nose. Charlie tucked his face into Tommy’s shoulder and shook his head. Wilbur sighed, “Charlie...”

“It was heavy!” Charlie explained, his voice muffled. “I’m sorry...please don’t tell Quackity.”

“What did he talk about? Charlie look at me,” Wilbur said sternly and Charlie slowly pulled back to look at him, his head hung lowly as he shrugged. “This is important.”

“Nothing, really. He just said it was nice of me to carry back stuff for my dad and when we got close to the bakery I told him I could carry the rest home by myself. I thanked him and he left. That was it, I promise!”

“Primes, Charlie, don’t talk to strangers, you know better than that,” Techno scolded and then turned to eye Wilbur. Something unspoken passed between the two and Tommy grunted in frustration that he couldn’t understand.

“Are you going to tell, Quackity?” Charlie asked and Wilbur eyed him sternly, the answer obvious. Charlie ducked his head. “Aw, man...”

Wilbur sighed and turned to Tommy. “I’m gonna sit here with him till Q gets back if you and Techno want to head back to the library.”

Techno nodded and finished the potato salad that he had found in the icebox while Charlie chose to clutch onto Tommy, trying to escape his fate. Tommy patted his head sympathetically as Wilbur snatched the kid up from under his arms, holding him like one would hold a cat. Charlie kicked his feet and complained, “I want to stay with Tommy!”

Tommy held back his laughter as he watched Wilbur carry Charlie out of the room, down the hall where he remembered Quackity’s and Charlie’s apartment being.

“Sorry, you’ve lost your Tommy privilege for today.”

“That’s not even a thing!”

“It wasn’t till now. Congratulations.”

“Put me down! I know my rights! I want a lawyer!”

“What on earth are you talking about?” Wilbur and Charlie’s arguing slowly trailed off.

As soon as they were out of earshot Tommy busted out into shaky laughter which quickly turned into mournful hiccups and stifled cries as he remembered the devastating realization he’d just come to.

Techno set down his plate and rushed over to him, quickly enveloping the crying teen in his arms. Tommy clutched onto him tight, burying his face into his chest. Techno rested his cheek against the top of his head while one of his hands came to rest at the base of his skull, thumbing gently through

his hair. He heard his brother murmur into his hair repeatedly, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Tommy. I’m so sorry—”

“It’s really all gone, isn’t it? Everything. He took everything,” Tommy cried, his tears seeping into Techno’s shirt. “My wings, my powers... *everything* ...”

“No, he didn’t. You’re still here,” Techno said, shaking his head. “You are what matters most.”

“He said I’d be worthless without them yet he hated me for having them anyway,” Tommy sobbed, tightening his arms around his waist. His fingers brushed against his brother’s wing. Techno stiffened but Tommy knew the words he was choking on. “It’s okay you can say it.”

“I’ll kill him. One day. I will kill him for that and for everything else,” Techno swore and scooped him up off the table and into his arms, his lone wing came up to wrap around him, shielding him from any guard who might be watching and shielding him from the world itself.

“But what if you lose? I don’t want him to kill you. I don’t want you to die,” Tommy fretted but Techno shook his head.

“*Technoblade never dies*,” he promised. “But I won’t leave you. Not when you need me. I promise you, Theseus.”

“I think I’ll always need you then,” Tommy said with a frown and Techno laughed softly.

“Then I’ll stay,” Techno assured and Tommy’s shoulders slumped in relief as he rested his head against his big brother’s shoulder. Tommy nodded and decided it was okay to be coddled at least for a little while. He let Techno carry him back partially to the library till his tears subsided and he calmed. When he asked, Techno complied instantly, pulling back his wing to release him. Even so, Tommy still leaned heavily into his brother’s side.

The walk back was quiet, nearly comforting, and for a moment Tommy thought maybe he could go the rest of the day without any more deep emotional conversations. And then the world said, ‘*Ha! You thought!*’

The moment the two opened the door to the library, Tommy's ears were flooded by the beautiful sound of a sad grand piano. His fingers twitched and he once again felt that familiar urge to play such a fine instrument. He looked to see who was making such a perfect melody and his breath caught when terrified blue eyes met his own. The piano went silent, the composer too petrified to continue his piece.

Techno stiffened for a moment before he rested a hand atop his shoulder and said, "I'm gonna go talk to Dad but I'll be back okay? If anything happens the guards are near."

Tommy nodded nervously but didn't look away. He heard the door shut behind him and took in a deep breath as he faced his best friend and all the pain that stood between them.

"*Tubbo...*" Tommy whispered into the air and immediately the ramling's ears flattened at the sound of his name spoken with such softness. Tubbo's eyes filled with tears and he quickly looked away, choosing instead to hide behind his shaggy hair the same way Tommy often did. He wondered if Tubbo was who he'd learned that habit from or vice versa. Tommy frowned and practically limped over to sit next to him, his legs aching and his back starting to burn again. Not that he minded, this was more important than some pain that would eventually heal.

Tommy would argue that the pain of Tubbo avoiding him far outweighed the pain of his broken body. Tommy skimmed his fingers over the keys, not pressing down hard enough to make noise, just to feel the smooth surface. It was so unlike his piano in the tower, the keys were perfectly aligned and flawless, no chips or cracks to be found. He suddenly remembered that day before Wilbur and Techno had found him and Crow had jumped across his keys, trying to press them down with her tiny feet. He sniffled, his heart clenched mournfully in his chest.

"Play something," Tommy asked quietly.

Tubbo jerked his head up. "What?"

"Play something and I'll join in," he asked again. Tubbo frowned as if he was about to argue but Tommy quickly hissed, "Play something, *please*, and don't you dare ask me to hate you."

"Tom, I—"

“Please,” he begged.

Tubbo’s lower lip trembled but he nodded and brushed his hands over the lower keys, hesitant as he searched for a song. Tommy’s eyes immediately landed on the bandages covering his palms and fingers and his breath hitched. Tubbo’s eyes half met his with sorrow before turning back to the keys, finally, his fingers began to move stiffly across the keys, playing a simple melody for Tommy to add to.

Tommy hoped he didn’t sound too off, not that it mattered, as he trailed into the song, matching its low soft notes with crisp clear ones. Tommy let his eyes flutter shut once he felt comfortable with the way he sounded and let out a deep breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding.

He noticed that Tubbo had relaxed at his side as well, investing himself in the music. The music was almost healing as their song filled the comforting silence of the Library. Their hands weaved over each other’s to reach their respective keys and Tommy winced as he noticed the carefully wrapped bandages around Tubbo’s palm and fingers and the way he favored his less injured hand as he played. Did it hurt when he played? Did he care? Tommy slowly led to a close at the thought and the melody faded into silence.

Tommy’s hands fluttered a moment on the keys till he wrapped them around himself, almost like a hug. He turned to Tubbo and said, “Out of everyone I was forced to forget...you were the person my mind clung onto the longest.”

Tubbo let out a choked sound while Tommy stared at his reflection in the shine of the piano. The boy who stared back looked like a stranger to him.

“Even still, I’m not sure they ever really succeeded. I forgot your name and who you were...but I never quite forgot your eyes or your horns. Your brown hair and big doofy ears,” Tommy said with a soft laugh. “Though I’d say you’ve grown into them now.”

“We were apart but you still followed me around my whole life. You were my imaginary friend that I played with when I was alone. Your eyes were the color of the wardrobe in my room and I could sometimes hear your voice when I thought of stupid shit to do. I mastered songs we butchered on the piano when we were little. You were my best friend and I didn’t even know your name.” Tommy grabbed Tubbo’s hand gently into his own and thumbed over the bandages. It took a moment but finally, Tubbo met his gaze. Tears were already spilling over his cheeks and his composure was breaking down more and more with every passing second. Tommy’s voice broke as he said, “You told me that I forgot you. Which is true enough...but...but I never lost you.”

“Th—” Tubbo heaved back a sob and began to shake as he tried to hold himself together. His free hand came up to cover his good eye.

“When Ranboo saved me from Purpled and you appeared...for a moment I recognized you. When we danced together in the square and you crashed into me like an idiot, I recognized you. And then when I went into the Nursery and looked at that *tiny* bed...I remembered you kicking me in your sleep so I shoved you off the bed,” Tommy laughed while tears streamed down his face, he used his free hand to pointlessly try to wipe them away. “I thought at first when I had my nightmare that I’d wake up with you still clinging onto me but I’m happy you weren’t... I can’t imagine what he would’ve done to you, Tubbo. He hurt Tech, Wil, and our dads so fucking bad. And we were so *little* then. And I think he might’ve...that he would’ve...I— *Oh gods, Tubbo* —”

Tubbo finally let out the sob that was drowning him and pulled him into his arms causing Tommy to gasp out a cry. He clung to him as tight as he could as the two boys finally fell apart.

“You—You saved my life, you idiot. Don’t ever forget that,” Tommy demanded, his face buried in his neck.

“I should’ve gone with you...’should’ve protected you. I’m so fucking sorry, Tommy,” Tubbo clutched onto his shirt, careful still to mind his back even while sobbing into each other. His voice came out muffled by Tommy’s shirt, “I-I’m sorry, Theseus.”

“It’s not your fault. They would’ve killed you. I’m so glad you left so you didn’t miss your stupid curfew. I-I wanted you safe. I *want* you safe, Tubbo,” Tommy pleaded. “Please be safe you reckless bastard. Can’t believe you blew off half of your fucking face while I was gone.”

Tubbo laughed into his shoulder for a moment before he hiccuped out, “In my defense—”

Tommy pulled back to scold him jokingly with a dumb grin on his face and tears and snot streaming down his face, “No! No, no, there’s no ‘in my defense’! How the *hell* did you even manage to be that stupid? Dumbass bitch. Look at you, you’re half blind!”

“The ladies find it mysterious,” Tubbo snarked and Tommy physically could not roll his eyes any harder.

“Oh my gods, you asshole, you like *men*. Shut the fuck up. Even I can see that.”

The two descended into teary laughter and Tommy leaned his forehead against Tubbo's to spout out, “Can't believe you. Is this bench hurting your ass? Stupid idiot. Because it's hurting mine. Blew off your own face. Can we go sit in front of the fireplace? Straight my *ass*. It's also fucking cold. Are you cold? Why the hell would you make something that shoots out a firework when you've already been exploded by one before?! Okay, but for real, I'm cold and you're probably gonna have to carry me or some shit. I can't feel my legs.”

Tubbo rolled his eye and Tommy continued, “Can't even roll your eyes properly.”

“Oh my gods, shut up. I literally hate you already,” Tubbo groaned and tugged Tommy upright. He wrapped his arm around his neck and half dragged him towards the fireplace and set up a bunch of pillows for them, all the while Tommy kept listing off reasons why firearms were a terrible idea and why he would die a horrible death from hypothermia.

“I'm going to smother you in your sleep if you don't stop joking about my trauma, asshole,” Tubbo teased and lowered him onto the floor.

“You wouldn't dare. You'd miss me too much,” Tommy challenged loopily. Exhaustion and pain were starting to slightly cloud his mind. He slowly turned to lie down on his side and tucked a pillow under his head.

“No fucking shit, Tommy,” Tubbo scoffed and then mirrored his position. His eyes widened suddenly but before Tommy could ask what was wrong Tubbo was already digging around in his multiple pockets searching for something. He finally fished what Tommy assumed to be the item Ranboo had told him Tubbo had hurt his hands over.

I'm not sure how I feel about the phrase 'made with blood, sweat, and tears' being taken so literally. Tommy swallowed as Tubbo placed the compass in his hands. It was small enough to be worn as a necklace but long enough not to cover his emerald. The body was silver yet it had been engraved by flowers and leaves made of gold. The glass covering was perfect in every way and Tommy shuddered. But it was engraved inside the rim of the compass that nearly made him cry.

Your Tubbo.

“Shit...Ranboo told you how I messed up my hands didn't they?” Tubbo realized, his face falling as he began to pull the compass away. Tommy grabbed it before he could take it but nodded.

“Yeah...uh, they did.”

“Do...Do you still want it?” Tubbo asked in a small voice.

“Of course I want it. I just...why was this worth hurting yourself for?” Tommy asked, putting the chain around his neck.

Tubbo frowned and then fished out his own compass. He grabbed Tommy's and pressed them back to back. There was a strange flash of blue that disoriented him slightly and then Tubbo let go. Tubbo put his on and then said, “Watch the arrow and then me.”

Tubbo stood to his feet and walked a few feet to his left and Tommy's eyes widened when the arrow shifted to follow him. Tommy turned the compass in his hands and was absolutely baffled when it stayed pointing at Tubbo.

“Um..this way...this way we can't lose each other again, y'know...and I-” Tubbo trailed off, not meeting his gaze. Tommy squinted a minute to read the engraving on Tubbo's compass.

“*Your Tommy,*” Tommy read, confused. “Not Theseus?”

Tubbo's eyes widened. “Shit, I just assumed...I can change it if you want. I-I didn't know if you'd be comfortable with Theseus so I...”

“Shut up and come here so I can hug you,” Tommy said, with a teary laugh. Tubbo immediately slid to his knees and pulled him into another hug. “Can't believe I'm your True North, you cringy bastard.”

“I don’t want to lose you again,” Tubbo said shakily and Tommy hugged him tighter into his chest, resting his cheek into his hair, narrowly avoiding his horns. Ah well, If he got impaled at least it’d be worth it knowing he had his best friend back. Tubbo’s shoulders shook slightly as he pleaded “Please don’t go.”

Tommy stroked his hair softly and swore, “I won’t. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Promise?” Tubbo asked.

“I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

Note to self: Do NOT watch SAD-ist's Clingyduo Evelyn Evelyn animatic before writing TGP!Clingyduo because HOLY SHIT---

The beginning of the end starts next chapter (see you all in 6-8 business weeks SOB)

Interlude #2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Charlie grunted with exertion as he struggled to hoist up the heavy garbage bag into the oversized dumpster. He was too short to even see over the side, much less push something up into it that probably weighed more than he did! Charlie sighed.

Well...as far as punishments go, this could be a lot worse.

His da– *Quackity* had been less than pleased when Wilbur had told him what had happened.

“Charlie, Te dije que vinieras directamente a casa. ¿Podrías haber resultado herido!” Quackity had scolded nearly too fast for Charlie to translate. “¿Y si te hubiera pasado algo? ¿Y si te perdiera?”

Charlie simply tucked his head further into his knees, trying to hide from where he was sitting on his bed. He’d mumbled into his kneecaps, “I was fine! I could’ve outrun him easily. I’m not a baby.”

“Charlie, that’s not the point. You know what happened to my brother,” Wilbur added from where he stood leaning against the doorframe. Yes, yes. He’d heard what had happened to Theseus a thousand times. Over and over had the lesson been ingrained in his head to stay away from strangers and not turn out like The Lost Prince. Charlie grimaced as he realized no one was going to tell him the truth. Wilbur probably thought Charlie hadn’t figured it out but people had a tendency to gossip about things they weren’t supposed to. And while his own hybrid ears might struggle from time to time, the audio enhancers that Tubbo had made for him certainly didn’t.

“Tommy’s strong. He came home, didn’t he? I’d come home too.”

Quackity and Wilbur’s eyes went wide for a moment, taken aback. Charlie was too young to see the fear in them. Quackity quickly tried to recover as he sputtered, “You don’t know that, Charlie.”

“After eleven years—It took eleven years to bring him home.” Wilbur shook his head and straightened up. He moved to Quackity’s side, one hand on his hip ready to scold him like a stern parent. He noticed the way Quackity’s shoulders relaxed slightly the moment Wilbur was at his side. It was bad enough being scolded by Quackity but Wilbur too? Charlie wrapped his arms tight around himself as he grimaced at the two. Wilbur’s tone came out borderline desperate as he explained, “Charlie, Tommy was gone longer than you’ve been alive! You’re a child! You don’t know what people are capable of!”

There it was again. People underestimating him. Charlie was sick of it! Just because he was the youngest didn’t mean people could just treat him like he was stupid! Schlatt hadn’t when he’d gone to see him while Wilbur had been gone. He’d praised him on his cleverness! Tommy didn’t either. He was gentle and kind but never babied him. In fact, the teenager had told him all sorts of ideas he had for pranks and gags when they’d been dancing. Maybe Tommy knew how it felt as well, being the youngest. Or...well, he wasn’t entirely sure what was going on right now with the lockdown other than that Tommy had been hurt really badly by a bad guy with a mask and that he was Prince Theseus. Once he’d heard the gist of what happened that realization had dawned on him quickly. It had only taken a few guards whispering words they thought were private to confirm it.

So there! He was smart! He didn’t need to be babied!

They think I’m weak but I’ll show them. I’ll make them proud of me.

I will make you proud, Dad. I promise.

The first step was getting this trash bag over the rim of this stupid dumpster. Charlie yelled frustratedly as he lost his grip a third time and the bag crashed onto the ground. With one hand, Charlie attempted to grab the bag again from the precarious stool he’d made himself out of some old boxes. However just as he got his grip, he felt one of the boxes collapse which sent him flailing backward. Charlie screeched but just before he hit the ground he heard someone yelp and then he landed in a pair of strong arms.

“Woah, careful, kid! I got you!” The voice sounded panicked at first but then assured him. He steadied the boy, careful not to knock anything over as he pulled him back. The man chuckled humorously once he realized he was unharmed and then set the boy on his feet before kneeling in front of him. The man pulled back his hood to reveal an unblemished plain face with dark blonde hair. Charlie squinted, there was something strange about his face. It blurred just enough that Charlie then recognized bitter smell of magic in the air. Perhaps he was using some kind of concealing magic? Maybe he had bad acne or was ugly or something. He saw apothecaries use that kind of magic a lot for bad wounds. It wasn’t anything uncommon, just odd. The man smiled, green eyes shining. *“You alright? That could’ve been a nasty fall.”*

Charlie nodded graciously as he adjusted his glasses from where they'd fallen askew during his fall. The boy took in a deep breath as he looked over himself for injuries. When he found none he thanked him, "I'm okay! Thank you for saving me."

The man simply shook his head like it was nothing and eyed the trash bags on the ground quizzically. His expression evened back into a pleasant smile. "Mind if I help? I'm afraid you might fall in if I let you continue by yourself. Not that you aren't strong enough to do it on your own of course."

Pride swelled in his chest at the praise. Charlie paused a moment, remembering his mentor's warning. Then the boy huffed to himself and thought. *I'm not a baby. I'll show them!* Charlie brushed himself off and beamed. He nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, please. These bags are bigger than me!"

The man laughed as he hoisted the bag Charlie had dropped over his shoulder before chucking it into the dumpster effortlessly. Charlie tried to help with the smaller bags where he could but the stranger was more than happy to bear the brunt of the labor. The man hummed pleasantly as he eyed the little boy fondly. "You remind me of my younger brother a little bit. He's headstrong too, always looking for trouble."

Charlie slapped a hand to his chest in mock offense. "Me? I'm as innocent and sweet as they come. Trouble just follows me where I go."

"Yes, it certainly does." If Charlie hadn't been a child, hadn't been so desperate to prove himself, then maybe he would've heard the sinister edge in his tone.

Together the two worked to get the rest of the bags in the dumpster all while making pleasant conversation about Charlie's favorite subjects in school, hobbies, etc. All things Charlie was eager to talk about with anyone! He didn't have too many friends after all...Charlie repressed the urge to shudder as he remembered the day of Theseus' memorial and the group of asshole kids who'd taunted him. Once they were done and every bag had been cleared from the alley, Charlie thanked the man and asked, "What's your name? My dad doesn't like me talking to strangers but you can't be a stranger if I know your name! My name is Charlie!"

The man stretched out his hand to greet him happily as the dark blonde grinned, a bit too wide. "Hello Charlie, my name is Dream. It's a pleasure to meet you."

Dream. The name struck familiarity, almost as if he'd heard it whispered in passing. He wasn't sure why...Charlie wrinkled his nose. "That's a funny name."

"It is, isn't it?" Dream's eyes flashed darkly as he shut the dumpster and helped the boy down from his boxes. He held up his hand to which Charlie gladly high-fived it and said, "Well, Charlie. It was certainly nice to meet you. I'll try to keep this path in my route for next time your parents decide to make you lug out all that trash."

"So I'll see you again?" Charlie asked, excited at the idea of a new friend. The man smiled warmly as he pulled up his green hood.

"Oh, for certain. Don't worry, Charlie. We'll meet again."

Charlie waved to the man as he continued along his way. He puffed up his chest with pride and triumph. *See? Not kidnapped*. He was so strong! He should go tell Tommy! Just as he was about to run of he paused as he remembered. A frown tugged at his cheeks. As much as he liked Tommy he wasn't sure if he could trust him not to snitch. The age gap between the two was large enough to know that Tommy would probably scold him as well. Charlie hummed deep in thought for a moment and then sighed. This was one secret he'd keep to himself.

"Charlie! Come on, *limo pequeñito*! I've got dinner! Don't worry about the rest of the garbage, I'll get it!" He heard Quackity call from the back door. Charlie's stomach growled on cue and he eagerly started running for his dinner, unaware of the eyes watching him from the shadows. Unaware of the danger.

How could he? He was just a child.

The eyes didn't care.

Childhood, not youth

The most

innocent child

would still look

for comics

in a newspaper

talking about

death itself

-Ana S. Herazo

But You Can't Catch Me Now

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a two-parter bc my GOD it was long and so much was happening. But both are ready and Ch. 35 will be out tomorrow!

This chapter was beta-read by my lovely @arbitersart <3

Word Count: 7.5k

TW: Violence

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Ow, *ow*, Tubbo, take it easy with the poking and prodding!” Ranboo whined and jerked away from the ramling who scowled at him for nearly ruining his stitching.

“Don’t be such a baby, Ran,” Tubbo chided. Tommy snorted in amusement from where he lounged on the sofa in Tubbo’s lab, book in hand. *Lounge is a longshot. This is more like precarious seating.*

Tommy figured the maids hadn’t been in Tubbo’s lab in quite a while. *Can’t say I blame them. This lab is probably a bomb threat knowing Tubbo.*

“You’re literally stabbing me,” Ranboo complained, still trying to subtly scootch himself off the cluttered counter and as far away from Tubbo as possible.

“I’m literally sewing your wing, you dumbass. You still have two or three holes left before you can be considered ‘flight-ready’. And even then we need weeks for those holes to heal.”

“Well, could you stab me a little gentler?”

“Motherfucker, I am a *scientist* not a goddamn tailor—” Tubbo snapped, sharply tugging the thread into place. Ranboo winced from where they sat atop Tubbo’s workbench, fiddling with the hem of their cuffed sleeve.

"You're a craftsman. One who's good at his—"

Tubbo proceeded to raise his injured hands where the burns had faded from angry red to a light pink. He eyed Ranboo sourly. The prince paled. "Uhm..."

"Keep talking, numbnuts."

"Alright alright!" Tommy intervened between the two before one could stab the other in a more vital place. "Let me do it. You two clearly need a break from one another."

"You know how to sew?" Tubbo asked.

"Mhm," Tommy hummed, as he confiscated Tubbo's kit. "I made most of my clothes in the tower, once I was old enough. Dream thought it'd keep me busy at least, which I suppose he was right enough."

Tommy noticed the way both boys immediately stiffened at the name of his former captor. He frowned as he settled the wing Tubbo had been working on into his lap. "He's not going to magically go away, guys. If I can bear to say his name you should bear to hear it."

Techno had told him that he shouldn't talk about Dream. That he should let him rot in his mind. It had been two weeks since then and Tommy had decided against that counsel when he realized he actually felt *better* talking about what happened. Techno had simply shrugged and told him, *"If that's what you need then talk about him."*

Tubbo frowned at the ground as he put back on his gloves. He kicked at a stray lab vial on the floor and watched it roll beneath the sofa. "Fine. I still think we should call him 'target practice' but whatever, it's your trauma."

"Tubbo!" Tommy gasped with a stunned grin and the conversation thankfully lightened back up into jokes and laughter and fun between the three teenagers. Tommy looked at what progress Tubbo had made already on Ran's wing. The fabric Tubbo had constructed was certainly sturdy and yet flexible enough to not impede on Ranboo's mobility.

Tommy fitted the next piece to their wing and carefully lined up the needle to where Tubbo had previously marked it. He noticed Ranboo immediately bracing themselves. "On the count of three..." Tommy pushed the needle through. "*Three.*"

Ranboo hissed out a breath. "Ow."

Tommy bit his lip as he threaded the string through and secured it in place. He stared at Ranboo's wing solemnly. "Sorry... This could've been so much easier if I'd just finished healing them before...y'know."

Ranboo turned to him and grabbed his free hand. "Stop."

"I want so badly for this to work," Tommy whispered. And it was true. If anyone deserved to fly, it was Ranboo. And maybe it would help a part of him heal to know he helped his friend reach the clouds. "*I need* this to work..."

Ranboo nodded and rubbed circles into his palm. "I know. But it'll be okay if it doesn't. We will be okay."

"Right...right," Tommy agreed half-heartedly. "Also I'd rather you *not* fall out of the sky, please." The enderling chuckled at that and replied, "Yeah, that does not sound fun."

Tubbo simply waved the idea away as he rummaged through one of his cabinets, searching for more twine. "As if Phil would ever let any of us fall. You'll be fine, Boo."

Ranboo shuttered regardless but still gave a sharp nod. "I hope you're right."

The enderling winced as Tommy sewed another wedge of the special leather-like fabric that was patching up the remaining holes in Ranboo's wings. "*Ow.*"

"Was it better without the warning?" Tommy asked apologetically.

"I'm gonna complain either way," Ranboo admitted. "You might as well just go for it. The sooner this is done the better."

“We’ve still got like...three other holes, bossman.” Tubbo winced while Tommy did his best to get the fabric sewn as quickly and efficiently as he could.

“𐄂𐄂𐄂!” Ranboo spat as they grit their teeth. “Ow, ow, 𐄂𐄂, 𐄂𐄂.”

“Thes, hurry or stop,” Tubbo warned, shifting nervously at the way Ranboo’s eyes flashed purple.

Tommy bit his tongue as he threaded the final mark. Ranboo let out a whimper that made Tommy's hands shake as he hastily tied off the stitch. Ranboo eyed him, his gaze unnaturally harsh, but Tommy noticed the bright purple hue in their eye. He gently rubbed their arm as he soothed, "Ease up there big guy, all done with this one, see?"

He raised up his hands in surrender and Ranboo eyed him warily for a moment before the purple faded and they shook their head, slightly dazed.

Ranboo blinked. “Sorry, m’bad.”

“What was that?” Tommy asked cautiously. He knew Techno sometimes had moments like those. Moments where he lost himself to the voices in his head. He had yet to see it and knowing his older brother, he doubted Techno would *ever* let him anywhere near.

Tubbo came up behind the two and wiggled his hands dramatically. He spoke in a silly deep voice. “*The Ender Prince.*”

Tommy turned and eyed the enderling who was. “I thought *you* were The End Prince.”

“I am. It’s not really another person...he’s *me* technically, but I have no control over what he does. All I can do is just try to reign him in when I feel him take over. It’s actually the reason I train

under your brother. He's been helping me control it for the past year or so." Ranboo's shoulders slumped, suddenly sad. "Sometimes though...I can't stop him."

"Oh he's nothing but a big pushover. A few head rubs and he practically turns into a cat," Tubbo chuckled. "Hey, remember that time you woke up from a episode curled up in my lap—"

Ranboo slapped a hand over the other boy's mouth, his cheeks warming to a strange purple. "Nope —*Nopenopenope*—"

Tommy snickered at the two. "Aww...Ranboo is a cuddler?"

"The Ender Prince is *not* a cuddler, he's dangero—*aCK* Tubbo!" Ranboo jerked back as if they'd touched a stove while Tubbo cackled. "Ow! Did you seriously just lick my hand?"

"You were going to smother me! I don't appreciate being silenced! And for the record, you are equally as cuddly as your counterpart." Tubbo snorted, looking rather proud of himself as Ranboo went to clean his hand.

"Wait did that actually hurt—?" Tubbo's normal manic behavior evaporated into gentle concern. Tommy suppressed a small smile.

Ranboo turned with an alcohol wipe and shook their head. They flexed their hand. "No worse than a sunburn. It's already back to normal. No harm done."

Tubbo sighed in relief and then his expression grew devious. "I've even heard you purr before."

Ranboo raised an eyebrow and then innocently thwacked the ram with their good wing. Tubbo wobbled into Tommy who caught him easily with a laugh. But then Tubbo's hand brushed over his spine when he tried to regain his balance. Tommy gasped.

His stitches had been removed the other day (which had *not* been a good day for anyone) but Tommy still froze regardless. Bone-chilling fear from a night he wished he could forget washed over him for a fraction of a second before Tubbo quickly jerked his hand up to his shoulder,

steadying himself. The young prince took a deep breath as he swallowed back whatever fear resided in his throat.

Tubbo turned to him and asked, “You good?”

“*Yup*—“ Tommy replied, his voice cracking a moment before he rasped out as cheerfully as he could muster, “Never better.”

Tubbo gave a small smile before he clapped his hands and turned to Ranboo who was already eyeing him warily. “*Time for the disinfectant.*”

“You stay away from me, devil,” Ranboo hissed and cowered as Tubbo encroached on him slowly. The ram lunged and Ranboo screeched as he dove to hide behind Tommy. “Tommy, help. Tom, please if you have any place in your heart for me. *Save me.*”

Tommy winced and turned to his friend. “You do realize we need to properly disinfect those stitches right? I know it’s hypocritical for me to say that given my track record.”

Very hypocritical.

The newfound prince had a tendency to make himself scarce when the time to clean his wounds came around. In the two weeks since...since he’d arrived, he’d found himself a number of nooks and crannies to curl into whenever someone came looking. Of course, he was never alone. He still didn’t do well by himself but normally Tubbo, Ranboo, and even little Charlie would keep him company as he tried to muster his courage. Even Schlatt had once pretended to loiter around the library while Tommy tried not to panic as he played piano, knowing later he’d go back to the infirmary for *another* check-up.

And yet to his ever-growing surprise, no one complained. They were all so incredibly patient with him. *Everyone.*

Ranboo practically wilted and for a moment Tommy felt bad. But still, the last thing anyone wanted was for their wings to get a nasty infection.

“Have you no love for me?” Ranboo whined.

“Stop gaslighting me.”

“But Tommy—“

“*Suffer.*”

Ranboo buried his face into Tommy’s shoulder and Tommy reached back to pat their head sympathetically. Tubbo’s expression softened and he patted the table where the enderling had previously been sat. “It won’t hurt as badly as the stitches, Ran. But Tommy is right. We gotta clean it. After that, we can be done for the day.”

Ranboo groaned but didn’t argue any more than that.

But before they could begin there was a knock at the open door and a familiar voice called, “I don’t have the password Tubbo, but I’m here to collect my child.”

“Phil?” Tommy grinned and quickly bounded towards the door, abandoning Ranboo to whatever else Tubbo had planned. Before he could open the door, Tubbo appeared out of nowhere and blocked him. He held up a hand when Tommy began to protest.

Tubbo leaned his head back against the door and Tommy could see mischief written plain across his face. “Sorry bossman, I’m afraid I’m still gonna need that password.”

“Tubbo, open the door,” his father sighed.

“Nope!” Tubbo grinned.

“Tobias Underscore—“

“Hey, hey! No need to attack me. I’m just doing my job as Tommy’s protector—“ “Protector?” Tommy interjected, laughing.

“Eh, best friend, same thing. My gun and my Ranboo do more of the protecting bit. I’m here for dramatic flair. However, I’m afraid I’m still gonna need the correct password.”

“How about I’m the Emperor of the Antarctic Empire and The Angel of Death, so I do what I want.”

“Sorry, Your Majesty,” Tubbo cackled. “Not even close!”

“How about ‘I know about the rockets under your bed and your father sure doesn’t’?”

Tubbo paled comically and in many swift motions, he unlatched the even *more* comical amount of deadbolts he had on what had recently been a very broken door. He ushered Tommy forward. “U-Uhm, yep! Congrats, you got it. Bye! Sorry, Thes.”

“Bye, Tommy!” Ranboo called as well.

Tommy opened the door and bit back a laugh at the sight of his father, looking mildly exasperated but still humorous. Phil had traded his normal crown for his signature hat, something Tommy could happily say he remembered more vividly now. “Hi, Dad.”

Any annoyance left on his expression vanished immediately and a smile took its place. Phil wrapped a gentle arm around his shoulder to pull him into a brief hug which Tommy immediately melted into. His father pressed a kiss atop his head as he greeted, “Good morning, mate. It looks like your morning was eventful?”

Tommy nodded but had to ask, “Does Tubbo actually keep explosives under his bed?”

“*You can’t prove anything!*” Tubbo’s voice shouted muffled from behind the door. He heard Ranboo snicker.

“Well now we *know* he does,” Phil laughed as he led the two off. “An educated guess is all you need with that kid sometimes.”

Suddenly he paused and turned. “They better not be loaded, Toby.”

“*Me? Keep active explosives in my lab? Never,*” Tubbo replied, scoffing at the nickname that Tommy vaguely recalled. There was a beat of silence before Tubbo grumbled, “*Fine, I’ll unload them.*”

Phil smiled, contented that the warning would be enough to keep him from doing something stupid and continued on with his son.

“Where are we going?” Tommy asked, squinting at the sun that shone brightly through the open windows as they strode down the hall. His stomach twisted nervously. “We’re not going to the infirmary are we?”

“No, no, nothing like that. I actually wanted to show you something.” Phil shook his head, soothing his worries and explained with a strange note of anxiety in his tone. “Also I- uh wanted us to talk while we walked—uhm...”

His father paused, momentarily tongue-tied and jittery. His hand came up to nervously rub at the back of his neck. It was a strange sight, especially coming from an emperor. But this wasn’t the emperor right now was it? It was just Phil.

“You alright there, old man?” Tommy inquired with a dry laugh. He crossed his arms. “Talk about what?”

His father paused and fiddled with the chain around his neck. Tommy’s heart ached at the sight of his parents’ wedding rings and his gaze sunk to the floor. He didn’t see the sad way his father looked at him. Phil’s arms dropped to his sides and Tommy flinched.

“I don’t know you anymore, Tommy,” Phil admitted, pain visibly written across his expression. Tommy’s heart dropped. He let out a noise of pure *hurt* that was barely audible from the back of his

throat and sucked in a breath so sharp it made flinch. The intrusive thoughts flooded back to him despite all the progress he'd been making to chase them away forever.

Is he regretting taking me back? Did I do something wrong? What would I—what if they don't want me any—

The panic on his expression must have been obvious because instantly his father's hand was entwined tightly in his own, jarring him from his thoughts. Phil's voice sounded borderline frantic as he assured him, "That came out wrong—*of course* I know you, Theseus. You are my son and I love you so much. I just mean...I don't know anything about you anymore. You're all grown up... and I highly doubt your favorite food is still mashed peas and cake."

Oh. Relief bubbled in his chest, chasing the tight feeling away as quickly as it had come. *He just wants to get to know me.*

Then he furrowed his brow. "Wait like mashed together?"

"Together." *Oh, ew.*

Tommy wrinkled his nose. "Definitely *not*. But if you get to ask me stuff then I get to ask you stuff. Deal?"

"Sounds fair. Deal," Phil agreed and pulled back to walk next to him, one of his large wings came up to gently hover around his shoulder, almost like a shield. Or a hug. "So what is it? Your favorite food?"

Tommy pondered the question a moment but the answer came easily enough. "*Strawberries.*"

"Strawberries?"

Tommy nodded. "Strawberries. At least, that's what I think they're called. He brought them for me once when I was around ten and I've never forgotten the taste of them. He never brought them

again after that but Crow sometimes would find a stray one and bring it to me. I think she liked them just as much as I did.”

“She did,” Phil said softly, and then cleared his throat. “She *does*. You and her always had a sweet tooth. In any case, there’s no shortage of strawberries here.”

Tommy couldn’t help the way his eyes lit up with anticipation at that. He’d have to hunt down Charlie later to find out if it was true.

“Your turn,” His father said cheerfully.

Tommy grinned. “Alright...what do you like to do? Y’know when you’re not busy with all the Emperor and Dad shit.”

Phil chuckled at that, humming to himself as he gathered his answer. They turned a corridor and Tommy trailed close beside the Emperor as the guards eyed him, curious of course to see the little lost prince who’d found his way home.

He still hadn’t made his public appearance, but it was getting harder and harder to avoid it. The kingdom, while no longer on lockdown, was still entirely in the dark about what happened on his birthday. And the twins especially seemed determined to keep it that way for as long as possible. Their overprotectiveness was as endearing as it was irritating.

The only people who’d been informed as of this point were the palace staff and guards. And despite Techno’s strict order to stay out of his sight, Tommy would often catch servants trying to catch a glimpse of him. Thankfully most of the time they would duck their head apologetically and flee. Even so, it terrified him more than he cared to admit, though it was slowly getting easier. His therapy sessions he’d reluctantly started with Captain Puffy (who he was beginning to recall more and more) had been helping him with his fear. However, he was *this* close to telling the staff next time to *fuck off*. Phil curled his wing further around his son, hiding him from the unwanted attention.

“I make maps.” Phil smiled. “An absurd amount probably.”

“Maps?” Tommy asked but nodded his head, slightly confused but ever curious.

“Mhm. I’ve made hundreds of them, detailing as much of the world as I was able to explore before my ‘millennia coma’. Though, I’m sure many of them are long since outdated...” Phil trailed off, the hint bounding right over Tommy’s head, of course. Still, Phil looked at him with nothing other than adoration and continued, “Before you and your brothers and long before The Antarctic Empire, I was the only avian in existence then. Or...at the very least I was the first.”

“The very first one?” Tommy questioned curiously.

Philza nodded. “Well, the gods were there long before Death arrived. Back then the world was barren, devoid of life for centuries from what your mother has told me. And then one day...there was more life than they knew what to do with. So they sent down your mother to create balance and then me.”

“Wait if avians have only been around the last millenia and you were the first...how old are you?”

“A few years younger than Death herself. So let’s just say I’ve been around since before time was a concept.” Phil then let out a small sigh of nostalgia. “The world was so *new* then...everything was completely unexplored and wild. Your mother would send me out on expeditions from time to time and I’d spend days soaring through the sky and charting everything I could. I would draw and map till my hands ached and my wings nearly gave way to exhaustion. It was *incredible*, Tommy. Everything I could see, from the smallest of lakes to the most beautiful and desolate deserts, across seas and snowy mountains. Across forests where the trees touched the sky and down to the darkest of caverns. *Everything*.”

Tommy tried to imagine it. He tried to envision his father flying around the world...Tommy could hardly fathom it. The world was much bigger than his view from the tower. He was so much smaller than he’d realized. But how could he have known? Maps were one of the many things that Dream strictly prohibited. Dream’s voice rang as clear and angry as the day he’d left, *Why do you need them? They’re a temptation for you, Tommy. If I gave you a map, gods know you’d never shut up about leaving.*

Tommy shoved the memory away. He’d seen crude drawings in some of his history books of what they supposed the planet looked like. Tommy wasn’t sure he agreed with some of them though, especially the older ones that talked of waterfalls that led to the end of the world. He’d been tracking constellations and planets long enough to know the Earth revolved like a spinning top. Or something like that.

“Will you take me one day?” Tommy asked without thinking, without remembering the cold truth.

“To the sea? The forest?”

The Emperor let out a small laugh, not mocking him in the slightest. Not letting the lack of Tommy’s wings stop him. “Perhaps the Taiga, or maybe the great red desert. So many options.”

Tommy’s eyes sparkled at the possibility. He nodded in delight. “Everything. I want to see everything.”

He wanted to see the world, regardless of whether he had his wings or not. Hope surged in his chest. Maybe this wasn’t the end after all. Perhaps his dream of exploring the world was possible.

“One day, I will show you the whole world, Theseus,” Phil promised as he tucked that pesky strand of blond that always fell into Tommy’s eyes behind his ear. His expression flickered a moment but then he smiled warmly. “But for now, how about the gardens?”

“You have a garden?” Tommy asked. Then his eyes widened when he remembered the meadow. It seemed so long ago now...following the twins through the forest into the open field, sharing lunch together while still wary of one another. So much had changed in so short a time. How strange it was to think he’d once been terrified of Wilbur and Techno. It seemed silly now. He tried to envision that meadow. He tried to remember the beautiful mixture of wildflowers and the smell of a spring morning. Tommy opened his eyes. Surely the Emperor’s garden was far more lush and enchanting than that wonderful meadow.

“Not mine.” Phil shook his head and then his expression grew melancholy. “Your mother’s.”

His heart panged. While the past two weeks had been wonderful (except for the infirmary, fuck that place.), there was still the soul-crushing grief that Tommy felt constantly for Crow. For his mother. For his best friend and companion that he’d known all his life. He missed the feeling of her atop his shoulder, nipping at his ear whenever he cracked his stupid jokes. He missed her gentle chirps in the morning when she’d wake him up. She never allowed him to waste the day away moping in his bed. He missed the way she’d bring him gifts that he now knew were to keep him sane long enough till someone could save him. Kristin had fought tooth and nail to keep him alive and had lost her own freedom in the process. And the worst part was, she hadn’t regretted any of it.

She had vanished from the abyss with a mournful expression alongside such relieved joy. Tommy made a choked sound in the back of his throat and he nodded. "I'd like that."

Phil smiled, his own eyes shining. "Ah, my turn."

"Go for it."

The emperor hummed for a moment and then asked, "Well...what about you then? I know you love the piano and the outdoors obviously but you haven't really spoken of any of your other interests."

Hoo boy. *Hobbies*. Touchy subject. Because most people had hobbies to relax. Tommy had hobbies to keep himself sane. But Phil probably didn't need to know that...well maybe he did. "Uh...well I'm not gonna lie, I was pretty limited on the stuff I could do. The tower only had so much space and Dream only had so much patience for noise when he was home..."

Tommy trailed off for a moment, lost in his mind for a moment. He shook himself before his father could ask if he was alright. "I would read a *lot*, I love books, any genre, and even the ones I've read millions of times over. I'm gonna have a fuckin' field day in that library at some point."

His father chuckled softly at that. Tommy felt the anxiety in his chest relax as he continued, "I made my own meals so I learned to enjoy cooking and baking. I got really good at a lot of *random* shit. Like pottery and candle-making one year. I'm still not entirely sure what that was about. Dream just brought home a shit ton of wax and clay one day. I learned to climb the beams of the tower and got pretty acrobatic. I learned to sew my own clothes and how to chart the stars and planets while I searched for your lanterns. I taught myself to sing and got semi-decent at the guitar. What else...? Oh, things would break all the time in the tower so it fell on me to fix it with whatever materials and vague instructions Dream would give me. I didn't mind, it was kinda fun learning how things worked and how to fix it."

Tommy took a breath and turned to his father whose eyes were wide in interest. "That's a lot of hobbies," he said surprised.

"I had a lot of time to kill," Tommy said bluntly and Phil winced at that. Tommy waved off his concern. "I'm a jack-of-all-trades, to be honest. I had to learn to love whatever there was in the tower to learn. Whatever there was to do that wasn't outside or forbidden I mastered the skill. From maths to fencing with my frying pan to even picking up sign language. Whatever kept me from thinking about the pain in my back from my wings rotting and regenerating over and over again.

Whatever kept me from being bored. Crow did everything she could to keep me going. Boredom meant depression and I still had hope then that I would someday leave the tower.” The teen stopped, his heart ached and Tommy could almost feel the cracks in it. His apology came out as a whisper. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to kill the mood.”

“No, that’s okay. I want to know you, Tommy. Even the painful parts if you’ll let me.” Phil placed a hand on his shoulder and squeezed it gently. Still, Tommy could see the rage he was attempting to stifle. If looks could kill, Dream would be dead a million times over by now. “I want to know what I’ve missed, the good...and the bad. However, both are up to you. I will never push you, Theseus.”

Tommy’s heart hurt a little less as it warmed and he leaned into his father’s side a moment and claimed, “It wasn’t all bad. I’m pretty creative now and I’ve got eleven years of pent-up energy and whimsy to get out of my system. I doubt I’ll ever be bored again.”

“Not likely when you’re a prince of the realm.” Phil let out a soft laugh. “Once the kingdom hears of your return and things truly settle we can discuss what parts of your education you need to catch up on. Politics, Maths, History and Geography, Science, even Astronomy if you want. And eventually, *far from now*, there will be travel opportunities with your brothers as well as galas and ceremonies. People your age will be there as well as old geezers like myself. There will also be opportunities to help people as well. I know you don’t have your powers anymore but there’s more than one way to help others. Your mother often held charity events for the poor, she opened orphanages, soup kitchens, free clinics, and more. She loved people and the people loved her...and you. Though as I said, it’s whatever you decide. You have control of your own life now.”

Tommy’s eyes sparkled excitedly, though he was nearly overwhelmed. It was a lot. And it would take a long time to get used to this life after everything. And while he wasn’t too overjoyed at the thought of being swarmed with attention, the pros seemed to outweigh any anxiety he’d undoubtedly have. “I suppose we should get this shitshow on the road then.”

The two closed in on a door guarded by two soldiers who of course were staring bug-eyed at the prince. Tommy curled into his father’s side, nervous. The two guards paled and suddenly they were scampering aside, clearly whatever look the Emperor had given the two must have been quite something because they seemed scared not only for their jobs but perhaps for their lives. One of them bowed to the two meekly and opened the double door for them. Phil pulled back his wings, tucking them away in his back, and led him forward into the garden.

Tommy sucked in a breath. It really was more beautiful than the meadow. His eyes wandered down the bricked path taking in the massive amounts of purple and blue flowers decorating the sides. He spun around looking at the purple rose bushes that lined the exterior. A lively pond to his right caught his attention and he immediately rushed over to it, careful to avoid his mother’s flowers and

the well-kept grass. His knees buried into the soil, unbothered by the dirt as he watched the strangely vibrant fish swim around. One eyed him particularly and Tommy tried to mimic it's funny expression. He turned, his eyes trailing up to the cloudy sky, promising rain at some point today. Birds chirped and bees fluttered around him, happy in their environment. He didn't disturb them as he stood back up, cattails tickling his cheeks. He spun again and this time noticed a huge greenhouse in the back.

"That's her herb garden. It's still well cared for to this day. This whole place is. When Techno was little he had a small potato farm in there. The gardeners still nurture it in case Techno ever cares to pick up the hobby again. It was hard for him to be here after you and your mother disappeared." Phil said solemnly and Tommy nodded furrowing his brow. He decided then that simply wouldn't do. He'd be more than happy to drag his brother out here and show him how to farm potatoes.

"It's beautiful," Tommy breathed, taking in the smell of rain and blooming flowers. He instinctively relaxed even with the cold morning air nipping his cheeks. He spotted another field of flowers decorating the outside of the greenhouse, these were bright and colorful. Fields of orange and yellows, reds and pinks. Warm colors that made him grin. Several small willow trees lined the back of the garden and Tommy spotted a path of stones that led to a rather comfy reading spot. A swinging bench hung from one of the trees, perfectly placed in the shade. His father tapped his shoulder and directed Tommy's attention to the left.

His eyes widened as he spotted the biggest tree of all, a massive willow tree stood strong in the center of the garden. Its leaves swayed in the wind and wind chimes that hung off of some of the branches filled the garden with its soft melody. Tommy closed his eyes trying to remember the garden, trying to recall his mother's face smudged with dirt as she showed him how to carefully water the flowers.

"She always wore gloves here, didn't he?" Tommy recalled randomly. Phil's eyes widened and then he smiled, teary as always when he spoke of his beloved wife.

"Unfortunately being the Goddess of Death...meant that she had to. Every time she'd touch a plant, they'd be dead the next morning. It drove her nuts at first but she got creative pretty quickly and this was her favorite place. She worked so hard on it."

"It's amazing," Tommy breathed...and then froze as he noticed a statue standing close to the giant Willow. It was surrounded by roses. Tommy wordlessly walked the path to it with Phil trailing him. His breath caught in his throat at the sight of his mother, forever immortalized in stone. She looked almost exactly as she had that night in his infirmary.

To anyone who simply knew her as the Empress and the Goddess of Death the statue was intimidating, a warning that she protected this kingdom. A symbol of strength. But to him...he just saw his mother looking down upon him, loving and gentle. Yet... Tommy didn't find his mother in its eyes. He turned away. He asked his father in a voice so quiet with grief, "Is this what you wanted to show me?"

"No, not that...*this*." Tommy looked up and his eyes filled with tears. In his father's hands, was the very same broken piano string Crow had taken from the tower after finding it a replacement. Tommy had just assumed she had thrown it away...he hadn't even given it a second thought.

"Is...Is this yours, Tommy?" Phil asked, his voice soft but shaking with emotion. Tommy could only nod as he tried to choke back a sob. "I found in the garden the day Wilbur ran off, the day before they found you. It wasn't until I came here this morning that it clicked."

"How? I...where did you...?" Tommy stammered and Phil shook his head, mournfully. "*How is that here?*"

"I don't know. I can only assume Crow brought it here so that I would see it. I thought it was a cruel joke at first. That some servant had left it there to taunt me...to torment me on such an awful day. But it wasn't that at all. She left it there to show me that you were still alive." Phil smiled as tears gathered in eyes. "She left it there to give us *hope*."

The sob tore from Tommy's throat before he could stop it.

"*Crow...*" Tommy's face crumpled as he stared at the string and then he sank to his knees, shoving his face into his hands. Phil was by his side immediately, pulling him into his arms. Tommy buried his face into his chest with a cry. "*Cr-Crow...*"

"I'm sorry, Tommy. I shouldn't have shown you...it's too soon." Phil rocked him gently in his hold, wings wrapping around them to guard Theseus from prying eyes. He pressed his cheek against his hair. "I'm so sorry."

"No. No, I...I—" Tommy pulled back, taking a few shuttered breaths as he tried to pull himself together. He looked up and nodded. "It fucking hurts. It hurts so bad but I think I needed to see this. Thank you."

Phil raised a hand to brush away his tears and nodded quietly. “Everything she did, she did to bring you home.”

“I never got to tell her that I love her back. She said it to me and *I couldn't say it back*,” Tommy choked out.

“Oh, mate. She knows. She knows you love her. You never had to say it,” Phil promised. “She knew.”

Tommy looked down to pick up the piano string from where it had fallen to the ground. He clenched it tightly in his fist. He couldn't meet his gaze as he bit out, “I hope you know too.” One day he'd be able to say it out loud. One day.

“I know.” Phil nodded tearfully and smiled. He pressed a kiss to his brow and assured him, “I know, Theseus.”

Tommy tucked the string into his pocket and wiped his eyes. He desperately needed a tissue. His father helped him to his feet and squeezed his hand in his own. “There is...one more thing I have to show you actually.”

He looked at his father warily. “Am I going to cry?”

Phil pondered it over for a moment before shrugging. “Only one way to find out.”

Tommy sniffed and scowled at him. Phil laughed, still teary-eyed but amused at the rather cute expression. He ruffled his hair and then pointed to the giant willow tree that had caught his attention earlier. “It's just over there. I'll be right behind you.”

“I'm gonna punch you if I cry.”

“Technically that's treason, mate.”

“I do not fucking care.”

With that Tommy slowly began walking over, his arms hugged tightly around himself. He squinted as he spotted a strangely carved rock sitting next to the tree. His feet met the path and then he stopped, suddenly at a loss for words.

“Oh...um,” Tommy gawked as he stared down at what rested below the giant tree. A mixture of emotions flickered across his expression as he took in the sight of a large tombstone, beautifully crafted yet slightly worn by years of rain and snow. On it, in big bold pretty letters, was his name. Theseus was staring at his own grave.

Well, this is awkward.

Tommy raised a brow as he stared at his name engraved into the stone. He knelt down burying his knees into the dirt and brushed his fingers against the indented stone that bore his name and then below to his birthdate. The hyphen between his birth and his death made his mind spin. It trailed close to his supposed death, weeks before his fifth birthday. His mouth felt like sandpaper. He was lost for words to be honest. How many people could say they’ve seen their own grave?

He stood from the ground and frowned at the stone for a long moment.

“*Welp*, we might need to get rid of that,” Tommy said, lightly kicking his own grave with the tip of his boot. There was a beat of silence where Phil just stared wide at his son, completely taken aback...and then he started to laugh. It was a genuine laugh, hearty and loud and *happy*. Tommy broke into laughter as well and stepped away from his empty grave. He turned around to his father who was holding his stomach to keep himself from laughing, or maybe crying? The lines seemed to blur more often than not.

Phil wiped a tear from his eye and grinned gleefully at his youngest. “Theseus, it would be my absolute fuckin’ *pleasure*.”

“How about now?”

“Nope.”

There was a loud yet defeated sigh. “Damn.”

“I told you I’d make you wait for it and I meant it, Your Highness,” Quackity chuckled darkly as he chopped the vegetables on his cutting board. They’d been dancing around their near kiss for two weeks now and Quackity almost felt bad for making Wilbur wait so long. Almost. It was pretty funny watching him try different ways to convince him.

“You’re mean. Valid, but mean,” Wilbur whined jokingly and rested his head against his shoulder from where he stood behind him, a familiar scenario that Quackity was happy to see had returned after the shitshow of the past weeks.

“Fine, fine. Keep your germs to yourself then. I need to ask Tech about the crossbow.” Wilbur gave up for today and pushed himself back from where he was cornering the chef, but not before leaning into his ear to promise, “I’ll be back in an hour to take Charlie riding.”

He shivered as Wilbur pulled away and then his heart melted. *He dotes on Charlie so much now.* The thought made Q smile and his stomach fluttered.

Quackity hummed in content and then spotted something. And suddenly he was the one getting too close. Wilbur didn’t dare move as Quackity examined him, brow furrowed. He reached up to brush back Wilbur’s hair, revealing what had caught his eye—or the lack thereof. Wilbur blushed furiously at the touch and Q pulled back reluctantly. Wilbur didn’t press him on it. The man would joke and tease but never pressure.

That was something he’d never gotten from Karl and Sapnap.

The chef shrugged and then smirked. “You’re missing your emerald.”

Wilbur’s hand shot to his ear and he sighed, “Damn, I left it on my nightstand. I guess I’ll stop there as well...Any chance you know where Charlie ran off to?”

“He told me he was going to go play with a new friend of his after his lessons. They should be out by the gate. I couldn’t keep him grounded any longer.”

Wilbur frowned at that as he leaned against the counter. “What he said... makes me nervous. I don’t want to keep him locked up in here...the same goes for Tommy, but Charlie? He just doesn’t understand how dangerous it is. And he’s stubborn as hell, just like a certain chef I know...”

“Says you.” Quackity elbowed him in the ribs as he came up to lean beside him. The prince gave a mirthless laugh, his eyes contemplative and concerned. Quackity patted his arm, comfortingly and leaned his head against his shoulder. “He’s a smart kid. He’s just...so damn determined to prove himself. I’ve tried to make him understand that he doesn’t need to prove anything but he’s...” Quackity sighed. “Well, like you said, stubborn.”

“He’ll learn...just like we did,” Wilbur assuaged. Then he smiled. “Remember all those times Schlatt and Puffy caught us?”

“I remember you stealing an invisibility potion for us so we could keep goofing off,” Quackity said, reminiscent. Wilbur snorted at that.

“And Puffy somehow sniffed out the magic when Phil found us missing. Still...we didn’t get caught...that time at least. You ran back to the kitchen and I made it upstairs right before the potion wore off. Nearly scared the hell out of Techno...but he pretended I’d been there the whole time when Dad came back.”

The two leaned against one another in the bustling kitchen, the staff used to and probably exhausted by the pair’s pining. Finally, Wilbur sighed and pulled away. “Well...I suppose I’ll go see if Techno can salvage what’s left of my crossbow and then I’ll bring him inside. And hey—”

Quackity turned as Wilbur entwined their hands together. His voice practically melted him as he assured him, “It’s gonna be okay. He loves you too much to be mad forever. Charlie will come around.”

Quackity nodded, still worried, but appreciative. And then Wilbur smiled and Quackity finally gave in. It was official, two weeks was about all he could stand. “I have something for you when you get back tonight.”

Wilbur's eyes widened, adorably hopefully.

It was obvious Wilbur desperately wanted to quip something snarky but he bit his tongue, not wanting to ruin anything. He gave him the world's lamest 'thumbs up' and Quackity rolled his eyes. "That was so dumb. Get the hell out of my kitchen."

Laughter echoed through the kitchen once more and finally, Wilbur left.

Quackity hummed a song to himself, his chest light and bubbly. He probably looked sick with love. He was. The man took a few minutes to clean his workspace before handing over the rest of the meal prep to his staff for them to finish. He headed back to his room and briefly paused to let out a burst of quiet laughter. A silly love-struck grin forced its way onto his face and he leaned back against the wall, his face flushed.

He was so stupidly happy, it was absurd. It was insane.

He shook his head, pushing all his ridiculously gushy romantic thoughts to the back of his mind for later. He allowed one last smile of glee before he went back to his apartment.

He opened the door and multiple things happened at once, a hand grabbed his arm, twisting it painfully behind him, and then a needle stabbed into his bicep. Cold pain seeped into his arm and his head spun.

The figure slapped a hand over his mouth and Quackity immediately bit down, the copper taste of blood flooding his mouth. He spat out the foul taste, growling. His attacker hissed out a swear and shoved him forward. Quackity turned, woozy already but ready to swing. Yet before he could fight back he saw a flash of green and then the butt of a knife was slammed against his temple.

Everything went dark and Chaos laughed.

Chapter End Notes

Part Two is tomorrow! Let's see what Charlie is up to! :)

The statue bit loosely based off this TGP fanart by @cookiejugz
<https://www.instagram.com/p/C8N8MPLsiL0/?hl=en>

Do We Fall in Love? (and Fuck It up for Good)

Chapter Notes

please do not doxx me for this one. i swear i can fix them

TW: Violence, Non-Consensual Drug Use, Implied/Referenced Violence on a minor (its not bad I promise he will be fine. take a breath. the mental scarring will be worse)

Another thing, this chapter has TNTduo art that was only ever posted in discord (out of respect for Shubble) please do not repost it ANYWHERE. TGP!Wilbur art is meant for here and my discord ONLY bc he so closely resembles (and SIGH was originally based on the CC! who WE DESPISE WITH A BURNING PASSION)

I REPEAT. WE DO NOT SUPPORT ABUSERS. WE DO NOT SUPPORT WILLIAM GOLD HERE OR HIS FUCKASS BAND.

So WilburTWT FUCK OFF. THIS AINT FOR YOU.

well now that we've gotten that outta the way. Enjoy!

Word Count: 6k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm so so sorry.

Charlie's heart was pounding, his breath came out in sharp pants and his entire body shook in terror.

The paper he'd been given, along with the package rattled in his hands as he dodged and weaved through the hidden passages he knew like the back of his hand.

Tears streamed down his face and stifled sobs wracked his small body. He'd messed up so badly.

He should've listened.

He should've listened to Wilbur and Quackity. He should've listened to the one person who'd loved him more than anything.

Gods, why hadn't he listened?

Dream's sharp orders echoed in his ears as the man who he thought was maybe a new friend cornered him into the space between the wall and the dumpster. "You find Tommy, and you give this to him. It's a simple task even for a stupid little kid like you. And if you even think of telling a guard or anyone else, I *will* kill him. Your father will die and it will be *your fault*, Charlie. Do you understand?"

Charlie let out a choked cry but nodded. "If-If I...what are you going to do to Tommy? Why do you ___"

Dream grabbed him by his collar and lifted him up off the ground. The little boy's feet jerked and kicked briefly as he grabbed the hand holding him up. His jagged, bitten nails raked into Dream's skin as Charlie tried to pull himself up. Dream bared his teeth and hissed, "*You mind your own fucking business*. Tommy will know what the letter means. Or are you backing out? Does your Papa mean so little to you? Shame. He seems to mean a great deal to Prince Wilbur. I wonder how he'd feel about you being the cause of Quackity's death?"

"No! No! Don't hurt him!" Charlie sobbed, scrambling to yank at his collar. Dream let him drop to the harsh ground.

"Decide quickly, Slimecicle," Dream hissed, starting to turn away to the kitchen where he knew Q was busy preparing lunch *for him*. Charlie sobbed into the dirt, snot, and tears trailing down his face in remorse. He crawled forward.

"Okay! I'll do it! I won't tell anyone! I promise!" Charlie grabbed his cloak, trying to stop him. Dream looked down at him in disgust. Charlie jolted back before he could kick him brutally in the side.

Dream then smiled, his demeanor shifting instantly into something sickeningly sweet. "There's a good boy."

Charlie flinched when Dream picked him up off the ground and settled him to his feet. He handed the boy the note and package before brushing away any dirt and dust off him. The child didn't dare breathe when the man picked up his glasses that had cracked against the ground and settled them on his face with a hum. Charlie shook violently. The man patted his head before his grip tightened into his hair and he pulled his head back to meet his gaze. His voice grew cold again, "Remember. *Straight to Tommy.*"

Charlie yelped in pain but nodded frantically while repeating, "Straight to Tommy. *Straight to Tommy.*"

"Off with you," Dream snapped, releasing him and Charlie had never run so fast in his life.

Why didn't I listen?

Charlie stumbled through the passage, stopping briefly to muffle another sob. He briefly fell to his knees against the hard, cold steps. He felt his knees scraped painfully against the stone but he hardly felt it as he tried to pull himself together. He was close now.

"Straight to Tommy," Charlie whimpered. The sentence repeated endlessly.

A dopey-ass smile was still plastered across his face when Wilbur entered his twin's room. He smiled even brighter when he saw Technoblade and Theseus sitting across from one another playing what looked like a tense game of chess.

Techno looked up from where he was borderline scowling at his pieces. He raised a brow, amused by his twin's expression. "Well, you look rather pleased with yourself. What did you do?"

"Am I not allowed to simply be happy? Must there always be an ill intent behind joy?"

Techno simply gave him a pointed look.

Wilbur rolled his eyes and changed the topic. “Nevermind. Are you teaching Tommy how to play chess?”

“No, actually he’s kicking my ass right now. This is embarrassing.” Techno lowered his face into his hands.

Tommy turned around from his chair and grinned as he took Techno’s queen. His king was cornered and Techno was in no position to take any of his pieces. “Should I wait or just say ‘Checkmate’ now?”

“Kill me,” Techno groaned. “Just end me. Chat is making fun of me.”

“It’s not my fault you didn’t realize I knew how to play,” Tommy snorted and winked at his eldest brother. Wilbur shook his head with a bemused smirk.

“You told me you didn’t know how to play!” Techno’s head snapped up, looking offended.

“I told you I was *rusty*.” Tommy leaned forward in his chair with a shit-eating grin.

“Theseus, you beat me in like five minutes.”

“Like I said ‘*rusty*’. Shameful really, I—*wAGH*—” Tommy flailed as Techno lunged forward across the table and caught him in a playful headlock, just gentle enough not to hurt or scare him. Tommy smacked his arm and hilariously began growling like a feral animal, teeth bared and everything.

“Are you crazy sure he got all his shots?” Wilbur asked, leaning against Techno’s chair.

“Yes, unfortunately, he’s just like this.” Techno ruffled his hair.

“GRRAGAGAGAHAAH—“

“Okay, maybe we missed one—“

Techno chuckled and released their little brother. The blonde’s hair had fallen out of the bun Wilbur had taught him how to do and now it hung wildly in his face, wavy and healthy. It was no longer the frizzy unkempt mess it had been when the twins had found him. His eyes sparkled blue and even the color in his cheeks was coming back.

It would take much longer for him to finally look healthy again but it was a wonderful start.

Tommy swatted at him and hissed, “No! Bad gave me the rabies one too!”

“I can’t tell if that makes it worse or not...” Techno pondered, holding his brother just far enough away that he couldn’t swat at him anymore.

“Definitely worse,” Wilbur said, laughing at the two.

Tommy eventually stopped fighting and huffed, defeated. He sat back on the couch with a pout and Techno sat next to him, abandoning his spot for Wil to claim. Techno snorted at his expression, amused. Wilbur settled into the chair and asked Tommy, “Did you do anything fun today, Thes? Y’know other than destroying our brother’s pride...”

Techno threw a pillow at him.

Tommy immediately bit back a laugh. He hugged his arms across his chest as he said, “Well, I saw my own grave today so that was kinda weird. I told Dad we should probably get rid of it. False advertising y’know?”

Techno sputtered, choking on laughter immediately while Wilbur looked dumbstruck causing Tommy to laugh as well. Wilbur relaxed at that and chuckled nervously. He sucked in a breath and then grinned. “Oh, I’m sure Tubbo will *love* blowing that up.”

“Oh, that’s right, I also found out Tubbo’s lab is a bomb threat.”

“Was there ever any doubt?” Techno shook his head, amused, and grabbed Wilbur’s crossbow from where his twin had carelessly tossed it on the table. Techno gaped. The woodwork was charred to hell and the string was worn to the point of snapping. The barrel was starting to rust and the trigger was broken. The amount of damage was incomparable. He snapped his head up to ask (accuse) baffled, “Did you throw this thing into a furnace? How the fuck did you manage this?”

“No, actually it fell into a river with me and slammed against stone and into my spine, thank you. It then took on an ambush and *then*...Charlie tried to set it on fire," Wilbur said, crossing his legs.

“Little shit didn’t just try, he *succeeded*. He was that mad, huh?” Techno raised a brow and then picked off a blackened piece of what was now essentially charcoal.

Wilbur nodded, eyes wide in exhaustion as he recalled the *number* of fights Charlie and Q were having, many of which he was getting wrangled into because the kid just wouldn’t *listen*. “Oh yeah...he does not take being grounded well. I’ve never seen him act like this. I just don’t understand what’s gotten into him.”

Techno shrugged. “Is he still sneaking off? I can always block off that gate at night if you want. I don’t mind pissing off small children.”

He entertained the idea for a moment but in retrospect, it would probably just make him act out more than he already was.

“Maybe...maybe he just needs someone to listen to him,” Tommy spoke up, eyes soft with concern. “Instead of letting it get to the point of an argument or grounding him... just let him talk. See his point of view and whatnot.”

“Is that the Captain I hear?” Techno mocked cheekily, causing Tommy to scowl. “I thought you hated her therapy sessions.”

“It’s good advice! Therapy’s not so bad, I guess. Mostly. And at least she’s funny,” Tommy defended, and Techno patted his shoulder as a silent apology while still fiddling with the crossbow. Wilbur clasped his hands together anxiously but smiled appreciatively at the input and their antics. Techno caught his eye and Wilbur could see he was as exhausted as him. However, they both bore it with a grateful smile.

The past two weeks had been absolutely wonderful and gods be damned he was more than happy to bear it without complaint. Tommy was worth every single moment. But still, he, Techno, and their father had been buried for two weeks straight in an ungodly amount of missed work. And then, of course, there was the manhunt for Chaos and Theseus's return announcement, which he was so fucking sick of arguing with Schlatt over. And then finally there was whatever the fuck was happening with Charlie. It was making more sense now why Q was waiting. Things were so chaotic, the only time they’d spent together had been because Charlie’s behavior was so erratic.

Wilbur realized he’d been quiet for far too long when Techno cleared his throat. “Yeah...Puffy told Q something similar so he ungrounded him. I told Q I’d take him out for a ride on Ossium, maybe he’ll open up or...well, I don’t know. I do not understand eight-year-olds.” Wilbur leaned his head back on the couch, looking up at the ceiling. He sighed loudly and dramatically.

“I’m not gonna lie, Wil. I think it’s toast...literally. You’re gonna need a new one,” Techno conceded, chucking the useless hunk of charred wood and metal back on the table.

“Man...I liked that one,” Wilbur groaned. “Rest in peace, I guess.”

“Emphasis on ‘in pieces’,” Tommy pointed out with a chuckle, and then suddenly the boy stood and began untangling his hair till he was able to tie it back into his hair tie.

It wasn’t till the blonde started putting on his boots Wilbur moved the arm he’d thrown dramatically over his eyes down to ask, confused, “Uh...where are you going?”

The teen fiddled almost nervously as he tied up the laces. He stood upright and hugged himself the way he always did when he was anxious over something. “Well, it’s late afternoon, the sun is out and this place is stupidly over-guarded. I’m gonna *attempt* to walk to the library on my own. Puffy wants me to try at least and Niki said she’d meet me there to show me a book of hers.”

“Wow,” Techno gaped, clearly not expecting that and Wilbur was a little surprised as well. Not about Niki of course. She was so sweet with Tommy that it made sense she’d be there for emotional

support. “Chat says, ‘Pop off, king’.”

Tommy’s face warmed at the praise and to counter it he grabbed the pillow Wilbur had thrown at Techno and thwacked him with it as well while Techno defended himself with a book sitting next to their discarded game of chess.

“Alright then, let me head out first so I’m not tailing you then. I need to saddle up Ossium before I go get Charlie,” Wilbur decided, standing up to his feet to watch fondly as Tommy continued smacking Techno mercilessly with the pillow who was frantically trying to defend himself. He chuckled as he began heading out the door before he paused. “You two have fun and Tommy—”

The teen looked up at him and Wilbur smiled with pride. “I’m proud of you.”

Tommy flipped him off and Techno mumbled some kind of goodbye as he fumbled for his own pillow. Wilbur rolled his eyes in amusement but left before he somehow got wrangled in their roughhousing. He left with the smile he’d come in with as he made his way to the stables.

It didn’t take long to saddle up Ossium, the horse was more than happy to see him and even more happy when Wilbur brought out a bucket full of golden carrots for him to feast upon. He heard an unhappy grunt from behind him and turned to see Carl looking rather left out while Ossium munched away on the treat. Wilbur assured him, “Oh, don’t look at me like that. I haven’t forgotten you.”

With that, he unveiled the second bucket of carrots he’d brought with him from behind the stall door and Carl neighed happily as it was served to him. His brother’s horse bumped his head graciously into his chest, and Wilbur rubbed his nose affectionately. “You be good. I promise I’ll bring Os back safe and sound. I know you’ll hunt me down if I don’t.”

Carl nickered in agreement and Wilbur pulled back to finish saddling Ossium. When he’d finished he brushed back a final bit of dirt from Ossium’s coat and pet him gently, “Alright...I’ll go grab your favorite troublemaker. At least Charlie will be happy to see one of us.”

Ossium whinnied happily at the mention of the boy and settled happily back in his stall, content to wait.

He left the stable, taking a shortcut or two through the side garden and past several guards who bowed accordingly. He rounded the exterior till he reached the familiar courtyard in front of the kitchen. He eyed the entrance and felt his stomach flutter at the promise of tonight. His boots sunk into the mud from the rainstorm last night as he traveled through the back gate. He sucked in a breath, prepared for the sass he was about to receive, and then strode into the alley...where Charlie was not.

“Fuck,” Wilbur groaned. He’d done it again. Wilbur kicked the dumpster, swearing profusely. He was more than ready to take Ossium and a small battalion of guards to scour the market for the little shit. But then he paused when he spotted something strange out of the corner of his eye. He sunk down to get a closer look at faded footprints ingrained into the mud from boots too small to be his. No, they were definitely child-sized. *Maybe this will be easier than I thought.*

The trail looked somewhat recent, maybe twenty minutes old. He stood to his feet and took a moment to wipe away the misty rain from his glasses. As he settled them back on his face, he spotted another set of footprints embedded in the mud and froze. They obviously weren’t his...and they were too big to be Quackity’s. His eyes followed the tracks to a spot in the corner where it looked like something or someone had fallen. The larger footprints shuffle around for a moment, blending together with Charlie’s and then horrifically both begin to lead back into the courtyard.

Fear crept up his neck when suddenly Charlie’s prints curved sharply to the right and instead of going back to the kitchen, his messy boot marks trailed into the small opening into the part of the fence next to the wall. A piece of the fence had been pulled away, and from the looks of it, Wilbur knew he’d found the opening Charlie had been escaping from for the past two weeks. And yet...if this was the entrance he’d been escaping from unnoticed...why had the board been ripped away and so carelessly discarded on the ground? Charlie wasn’t stupid. He was too smart for his own good if you asked him. And he was smart enough to know how to hide his tracks. But it was as if Charlie had been in a hurry, and a frantic one by the look of it.

He racked his brain a moment, remembering the layout of the castle. If he guessed right, that side of the fence led back into a long since boarded-off entrance he and Quackity discovered years ago. One of the paths he knew led down to the servant quarters but dodged the kitchen. It was a clever way to sneak back in without being seen, though the passage was much too narrow for anyone to use...unless you were Charlie.

Of course, he found it.

So if Charlie had fled right...Wilbur turned to the stranger prints and then his eyes went wide in horror. He let out a choked cry and then he was running. He was running as fast as he fucking could with his heart racing in terror. Those boots, too large to be Quackity’s and unlike any guard boot

he'd seen led right into the kitchen, right to where Quackity was hard at work, right where he'd left him. He skidded into the kitchen, the mud on his own boots and floor nearly causing him to lose his balance. He looked up half expecting the entire kitchen's attention at the near crash but the ambient sound of workers continued. The screen Q sometimes put up to separate his workspace was drawn, meaning whoever's boot marks that were trailing through the kitchen had gone unseen. Which was so much worse. He turned to the hallway and his hand caught the corner of the wall as he sprinted down the hall to the servant's quarters.

The boots stopped at Quackity and Charlie's pad and Wilbur felt like he could vomit. He flung open the door frantically and Wilbur's heart dropped in his stomach. Terror raced through him as one of his worst fears dared to hold true. Before him, Quackity stood trying his hardest not to squirm. His eyes were unnaturally glassy and his form trembled. A bloodied hand clamped tightly around his waist and Wilbur felt a growl building up in his chest.

Quackity's gaze wandered disoriented by the sound and then slowly locked onto Wilbur. He could only watch as his brown eyes widened in pure horror. Wilbur sucked in a sharp breath at the sight of a knife pressed against his best friend's throat. The soulless mask that had haunted him for over a decade stared back at him, concealing the identity of the man who rested his head casually against the chef's shoulder with a smile. Clearly, he'd been waiting for him. The trail had been a trap. A stupidly obvious one too.

"Quackity—" Wilbur began, taking a step forward to which Chaos clenched the knife harder, dragging the man back with a yelp.

Chaos chuckled, "Careful now, Your Highness, this knife is quite sharp and I'd hate to ruin such a pretty neck. Now turn around and lock that door would you?"

Wilbur felt the urge to hurl again but suppressed it as he complied out of fear he might dig that knife in a little deeper. Quackity looked terrified. His eyes spastically darted around the living room, looking for something before focusing solely on Wilbur, pleading for help. Wilbur quickly realized it wasn't himself he was scared for. The prince's eyes frantically searched the room looking for the child. He hadn't taken a different path to the apartment at all. When Wilbur didn't find him he panicked, "Where's Charlie? I *swear* if you've laid a hand on him—"

"You'll what?" Chaos laughed and pushed up his mask revealing a plain face with striking green eyes and dark blonde hair. For the first time ever, Wilbur saw the face of the monster who'd destroyed his family. The man sneered. "You'll kill me? You'll sentence your little lover here to death that way."

Wilbur swallowed back tears and raised his hands in surrender. “*Please*. He has nothing to do with any of this. Charlie and Quackity are innocent.”

“So was Tommy,” Chaos pointed out and then turned his attention back to Quackity.

Chaos hummed and then ran his hand up Quackity’s neck to his jaw, he grabbed it harshly and eyed him objectively. A thin stream of blood trailed down his neck, lightly nicked by the sudden movement. He huffed, “I suppose one could understand the attraction. He’s a pretty one, I guess. But honestly, I have to ask, what’s the appeal of loving someone so far beneath your station, Prince Wilbur? Why all the fuss over *him*? He’s saddled already with that little urchin and he has nothing to offer you.”

Hatred boiled inside him and Wilbur bared his teeth at him. Quackity wasn’t just the love of his life but his *best friend*. He’d loved him a lot longer than he’d been *in love* with him. Wilbur fumed but kept his voice steady as he refuted, “Techno was right. You really *do* have a fucked up perspective on love.”

Chaos smiled at that. “Believe it or not, I do care for Tommy. As much as a hollowed vessel can at least. But it’s not enough to defy my master’s wishes; I knew that from day one. If your mother hadn’t meddled, he would’ve drifted off peacefully in his sleep and never felt any pain at all.”

“You tore the wings from his back like a fucking *butcher*—“ Wilbur snapped. Dream looked amused and sadistic. Though Wilbur guessed those were like synonyms to Chaos.

“If you and your brother hadn’t intervened, he could’ve been spared all that pain. All that *fear*. I can’t imagine how painful it must be now that those memory blockers are wearing off. His own memories of me clashing with fake ones. His memories of you are scattered to pieces. What we gave him...is not something that can wear off with no side effects. He was on it continuously for *years*. And that was for his own good. The human mind is not meant to carry that much grief. I meant to save him from that.”

“Why are you here, Chaos?” Wilbur bared through his teeth, narrowly avoiding biting his tongue. *I meant to save him from that*. Unfamiliar voices almost too quiet for him to hear cried out for blood from the darkest pits of his mind. Wilbur agreed. He wanted Chaos dead.

“*Chaos*... now there is a name I haven’t heard in a long time,” he said. “I think I prefer it to the one I told Tommy or should I say, His Highness? No...Tommy wouldn’t like that. He’s a feisty one

isn't he?"

"Keep his name out of your fucking mouth," Wilbur hissed, eyes bright red and rageful.

Wilbur was ready to snap at him again when Quackity stirred once more in Chaos' hold. His eyes were growing steadily heavier but the man reached out to him. "Wil...?" Chaos dragged him back and lulled him.

"Ah, ah, stay still. Your little one depends on it." Quackity stiffened in his hold, terrified and angry all at once.

But Charlie was alive. He hadn't come back to the apartment after all.

"Listen to him, Q. Don't move," Wilbur begged him.

"See? This doesn't have to be difficult at all if you both cooperate. Only one person here has to die."

Terror spiked through him as the image of Tommy lying broken in the infirmary flashed to the front of his mind. Wilbur hissed venomously, "Let me make something crystal fucking clear to you. You are *never* touching Tommy ever again."

"As if I'd make it that far again with the amount of security your father has ordered." Chaos rolled his eyes. "He's not who I'm here for. Not when there's a much easier target with a *pathetically* easy weakness."

Wilbur faltered at that, confused. Dream stared at him darkly, a crazed grin beginning to form as the pieces began to click.

Then who—?

His stomach dropped as it dawned on him. He raised a hand to his throat already imagining Chaos strangling the life out of him. “Oh...” he breathed.

“I have Tommy’s wings. I have everything I need other than a sacrifice, which was *supposed* to be Theseus. But...I think his older brother will suffice in his place. XD isn’t too picky.” Chaos slowly moved the blade from where it was shallowly cutting at Quackity’s throat and pointed it at Wilbur. “And I should very much prefer killing you over Tommy. Your mother murdered George and so I’d be happy to return the gesture. It’s a simple choice, really. You die or Tommy *and* your little boyfriend and his brat do. I think it’s a pretty fair deal.”

Wilbur tried not to flinch at the way Quackity’s drooping eyes immediately went wide in horror. Quackity looked at him and any hope that he had died in his eyes as he saw Wilbur’s resolve set in stone.

Wilbur inhaled shakily. “You...you’ll leave Tommy alone? And you’ll leave Charlie and Quackity and the rest of my family alone? You have to promise me *now* that no further harm will come to *any* of them.”

“Of course, Your Highness. If you die instead of Theseus...well you were already a prophesied child. You are your mother’s son, and that’s what the sacrifice calls for. The Son of Death pays for life eternal. If you die for him then I am freed from an eternity of servitude and Tommy will be free to live in peace. After all, I won’t be around to hurt him anymore,” Chaos assured, his smile so wide it was unnaturally monstrous. It suited him horrifically. Wilbur couldn’t be sure that the bastard would keep his promise...but if there was even a chance to ensure his family’s safety...

Tommy would never need to be scared again. He would be allowed to live the rest of his life in peace with a family that loved him *so much*. He’d be devastated of course by his death but he’d heal in time. Wilbur could only pray Phil and Techno would too. *Techno will never*. And the sorrow he felt with that knowledge was near crippling. But what was he supposed to do?

It was everything he’d promised Tommy he wouldn’t do. Everything he’d *begged* Technoblade not to do that night in the Infirmary. And yet here he stood, fully prepared to do it himself. He always had been, he realized. It only took seeing a knife at Quackity’s throat to see it.

Wilbur didn’t hesitate except only to whisper an apology to the wind in hopes it would reach his family. Who he now would never see again.

I’m so sorry. Forgive me.

“I’ll do it,” Wilbur’s voice was hardly above a whisper but he’d never been so sure of his choice. He would rather die than let anyone hurt Tommy again and he meant it with everything he had.

Wilbur would do anything to protect his family. It was a learned habit.

“No—“ Quackity’s head jolted and his eyes filled with tears that quickly spilled over. He tried to lunge towards him but Chaos easily restrained him, he didn’t even need the knife at this point. Quackity shook his head sluggishly and argued, “No! Wilbur—no no...don’t do this. You can’t! *Please* don’t do this.”

Chaos sneered at him. “Such a dedicated older brother. I’m glad we could easily come to an agreement.”

No longer seeing a reason to restrain Quackity now that Wilbur had agreed, Chaos shoved the heavily drugged man at the prince, the bargaining chip no longer worth anything to him.

Wilbur stumbled to catch him as the two crashed onto the floor. Quackity’s arms twitched unnaturally as if his muscles were straining uselessly to try and function. Still, somehow he managed to latch his arms tightly around Wilbur’s neck for as long as he could hold. Quackity flapped his wings futilely to help keep him upright but ultimately let out a wail of protest when he felt his body fail him. He slumped into him and Wilbur cradled the back of his head against his chest. Q struggled in his hold, trying to get a grasp on him as if he hoped it would keep Wilbur from leaving him.

“Don’t leave. *Don’t*. You can’t leave me...” Quackity begged him and Wilbur rubbed his back gently murmuring apologies into his hair. Quackity’s hands still scrambled to try and find a purchase on him. He continued to plead with him in a way he hoped Chaos couldn’t understand, “Por favor. No me dejes. Pensé que deberíamos ser felices. ¡Estuvimos a punto de ser felices! ¡Debe de haber otra manera!”

“I’m sorry, birdie,” Wilbur whispered into his cheek, his Spanish decent enough to understand what he’d said. He turned his now cold gaze back to Chaos. “I agreed to your terms. Now *where* is *Charlie*?”

“Let’s just say he’s running a quick errand for me,” When Wilbur shot up to protest, Chaos raised his hands in surrender. “Relax. The brat will be fine. He’s still in the castle and entirely unharmed, you have my word. Now Wilbur, do I have yours?”

“I told you I’d do it,” Wilbur growled, not looking up at him, as he carded his shaky fingers through Q’s hair in a fruitless attempt to console him. Chaos simply chuckled at his animosity.

“Time to go then, lover boy. Say your goodbyes while you can. I consider myself kinder than your mother in that regard,” Chaos sheathed his knife and placed his mask back on his face.

Wilbur turned to look down at Quackity and swallowed shakily before he spoke, “I have to leave you now, my love. I’m so sorry.”

Quackity’s eyes trailed up and a shaky hand slowly made its way to cup Wilbur’s cheek. His voice was weak from the sedative as he begged him, “Please—*please* don’t.”

Wilbur grabbed his hand and pressed it to his lips. “You’re going to be okay. My family will take care of you and Charlie. Just...be happy, Quackity. Find someone who can make you smile. Who can make you laugh and cry and love all over again. I want that for you. I want you to be happy.”

“W-Wil-“ Tears streamed down Quackity’s face. He didn’t need to find anyone else. He didn’t *want* anyone else. “I—“

Wilbur pressed his forehead against Quackity’s and whispered to him, “I don’t regret any of it but if I could do it differently, *I would’ve given you everything.*”

Quackity’s lower lip trembled at his confession and he hitched a sob in his throat.

Chaos tapped his foot from the doorway, a warning for him to wrap it up before he did himself. Wilbur ignored him, wishing so fucking badly he was as strong as his brothers at that moment.

If Wilbur had the strength he would’ve beaten Chaos to death then and there. But he didn’t. Unlike the rest of his family, Wilbur had no powers, no legacy as a great warrior, and no voices inside his

head that weren't his, even as mean as his own could often be. He wasn't a god and he wasn't brave.

But he was trying to be brave now.

Wilbur ran his thumb across Quackity's cheek all while the man mumbled slurred pleas at him with the most heartbroken expression he'd ever seen. It tore the prince to pieces inside. He'd sworn to himself years ago after Sapnap and Karl left him broken that he would never do anything to make Quackity so unhappy that he would look at him that way.

And yet here he was, staring into deep brown eyes that were *begging* him to think of another way. Begging him not to leave him like they had.

"Can I ask you again?" Wilbur's voice broke with the selfish request but Quackity knew immediately what he meant.

Quackity's expression crumpled and he broke back into small sobs as regret flooded his face. "I should've let you then. That night...I s-should've..."

Wilbur shook his head. "No. No, you were right then. I wasn't well. But I think we're out of time, Q."

Quackity can only nod to that as more tears slide down his face that had no right looking so devastated.

When Wilbur kisses him it's soft, desperate but so, so gentle. It's sad. Quackity doesn't feel fireworks in his chest, nor the intense fluttering in his stomach that he thought he would every time he dreamed of stepping over the line, crushing it beneath his feet. The only thing he can feel is Wilbur's soft lips crushed to his own and near-blinding *grief*. There's so much love that Wilbur pours into the kiss even as the man is sobbing against him. They both are. They are mourning a lost life. The taste of what could've been against his lips and Quackity is fucking *drowning* in it.



And then a cruel hand grabbed Wilbur by the back of his collar and all too soon it's over. Wilbur let out a choked cry as he was torn away from Quackity. The moment his lips are pulled from his own, Quackity realizes it's not enough. He wanted more. He needed more. He needed a whole lifetime of more. This wasn't fair. That wasn't what their first kiss was supposed to be like.

It wasn't supposed to also be their last.

Wilbur reached out for Q blindly a moment before remembering why he had to let go. His hand dropped and Quackity couldn't summon the strength to scream. "Tell my family I love them and that I'm sorry, but I couldn't let him hurt, Tommy," Wilbur begged, struggling in Chaos' hold to get his final words to him out. "And don't let him blame himself. It's not his fault. It's—"

"That's enough. Come on, we don't have time for this," Chaos growled coldly while Wilbur gagged briefly as he practically strangled him upright onto his feet by his necktie.

"Wilbur!" Quackity cried as he slumped back to the ground, no longer being supported by the prince. Quackity was able to roll himself onto his stomach in a frantic attempt to force himself upright or crawl or do fucking *anything*. But he couldn't. Not with the sedative. He was nearly on the brink of passing out as it was. He could hardly move, much less stop him. All he could do was try to reach him because he had to. *He had to*.

"I love you. I *lived* for you." Wilbur choked out to him. He begged him, "Live for me, Quackity."

He gave Quackity a final smile that he hoped conveyed all the words he never got to say as he was dragged out the door by Chaos. The door slammed shut and Quackity sobbed into the floor, still trying to crawl after them.

Chapter End Notes

aw yayyy tgp!tntduo had their first kiss:3 and possibly the last oop

Also thank you so much to the bilingual members of my discord for always helping me make sure Quackity's spanish isn't a google translated atrocity. I would never want to make yall feel like I just throw other cultures in not bothering to see if I've done my homework. I adore yall so so much (ty to @cookiejugz especially, putting that one sentence into past tense made that shit HURT)

oh boy I wonder whats in that package and letter dream gave charlie. surely nothing bad.

See you in the next chapter! I'm sure some of you are starting to piece together where this is headed...right? :)

Yeah, I Guess the End Is Here.

Chapter Notes

hey losers, get in the van. its time for angst hell.

This chapter was beta-read by my lovely @arbitersart <3

TW: surprisingly none??

Word Count: 8k

heads up! i recommend reading this chapter with dark mode (reversi) on! otherwise you'll miss some text

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy sucked in a deep breath. He was doing great. He was doing amazingly honestly. He was doing so fucking well and he wasn't panicking obviously.

Obviously.

Oh, this sucks ass.

It was like all of his senses were on high alert. He saw shadows in corners and every sound that wasn't his own footsteps made him want to run straight back to Techno's room. Tommy took a deep breath through his nose. *I can do this. He can't get me here. No one will let him get me here.*

Tommy exhaled and let his fingers trail against the edge of the wall, trying to give himself something to focus on. And yet when he looked all he could see was the ghost of his bloodied handprints staining the wallpaper. Tommy shut his eyes tightly. *Deep breaths.* Tommy inhaled till his lungs were screaming at him to stop. He could hear his own heart pounding in his ears along with the sound of cracking limbs. His fingers clenched into a fist and Tommy opened his eyes and kept walking.

Breathe. He could hear Puffy's gentle counsel in his mind. Tommy exhaled forcefully and the blood disappeared. *Right. Can't get distracted. Niki is waiting for me.*

Niki was waiting with a bright smile and gentle words to soothe his anxiety. It was crazy just how good she was at it too, though it made sense given who her younger sibling was. *Niki is waiting for me.* Tommy willed his feet to move and finally, he was able to pull away from the wall.

“T-Tommy?” A faint and shaky voice called out and Tommy slapped a hand to his mouth to muffle the shriek he let out. All the nervous tension that had been building snapped like a band as he jumped back. The voice yelped at his reaction and it was such a broken little sound that it stopped Tommy dead in his tracks. He looked to see Charlie peering at him from a secret passage from within the wall.

“Holy fuck Charlie—“ Tommy gasped, trying to catch his breath. He slapped a hand over his racing heart. “You scared the shit outta me. Why did you—“

Tommy froze as he finally took in the trembling boy. His face was wrought with tears and white as a sheet. His little hand shook on the latch of the door while the other clutched at a letter and package.

This was far from the mischievous kid he knew.

Tommy swallowed. Something was very wrong. Tommy was cautious as he approached the boy and when Charlie didn't flinch away he slowly knelt in front of him. He opened his arms to him and Charlie hugged himself tightly before his shoulders curled in and his legs gave way .

The child fell into his arms with a muted sob, the package and letter tumbling out of his hands and onto the floor. Charlie tore his glasses off his face but Tommy caught them before he could throw them on the floor. He buried his face into his shoulder and wept.

Tommy pulled him into his lap and ran his hand through his hair as he tried to console him. He shushed him gently as he asked, “What happened? Charlie, what's going on?”



He felt eyes on him and turned to see one of the guards stationed in the hall staring at him. Their eyes were wide as they looked at the two and Tommy felt every last bit of fear evaporate as his irritation gave way. He growled at the guard and cradled the back of Charlie's head defensively, trying to hide him away. "Turn around and start walking. I can take care of this myself."

"Y-Your Highness? Is everything...?"

"I said start fucking walking!" Tommy yelled, hopefully not loud enough to alert other guards. Clearly this one in particular had gotten a glare or two from his family because they bowed their head at him and immediately turned tail to fuck off.

Tommy pulled back to look Charlie over but other than scraped knees and being covered in dried mud, he was fine. He thumbed away tears and his heart broke to hear the pain in his sobs. If he was fine physically then what had been done to upset him this much?

Charlie couldn't answer. All he could do was slowly pull back and grab the letter off the ground. He clenched it in his fist and shakily croaked, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to—I didn't *know*."

His voice was barely audible.

"Sorry? Sorry for what? What is that?" Charlie shoved the letter into Tommy's hands and buried his face into his own. A sense of dread crept on him and Tommy's hands began to shake as he tore open the envelope.

As he read the contents he froze.

Time to come home, Tommy.

He had never been free of him, not really. The bubble of happiness he'd been living in popped like a balloon and reality set in. Dream would not stop till he was dead. He should've known. There was something else in the envelope. He dumped the contents into his hand and slapped a hand over his mouth to muffle the cry of horror he let out.

In his palm, sat one of his brother's emerald earrings. And Tommy had left Techno bac in his room not ten minutes ago. Techno had been wearing his earring and Tommy had been so busy goofing around with him that he hadn't seen if Wilbur had been wearing his.

Wilbur.

Dream had Wilbur. Dream was going to kill him. Or he was trying to lure Tommy there, which was much more likely and then he'd more than likely kill them both. It was the perfect trap. Dream

knew Tommy inside and out. And he knew exactly how to toy with him. Tommy wanted to laugh and hope the bitterness would choke him alive. Dream had always told him he was clingy and annoying...and he was right. Tommy latched on to every tiny bit of affection and validation Dream had given him for *years* . Tommy needed people in his life to love him. He lived off the feeling of being wanted. Dream had made sure of that.

Dream had made sure that Tommy couldn't live without him. That he needed *his* love to survive. And when Tommy had discovered that he didn't...Dream twisted it like a knife in his gut. He used it against him.

Tommy wrapped an arm around Charlie as he scrambled to grab the package from the ground. He looked around to see if there were any guards and when he found the hall empty he tore open the package to find a multitude of items. There was a map back to the tower as well as one of the castle interiors and every single hidden passage there was. The pit in his stomach made him nauseous and Tommy let out a choked whine that had Charlie clutching at him even tighter. He gently rubbed his back while his lungs burned. That explained how Dream had gotten Wilbur's earring and how he'd probably gotten into the nursery in the first place.

Tommy froze as his hand pressed against something round. He picked it up and gagged at the ender pearl that sat in it. He shoved it back into the package. He didn't even want to know how Dream had gotten *that* .

"Tommy...b-breathe. You—You're not breathing," Charlie whimpered in his arms and shook him slightly. *Breathe* .

"*Fuck*—" Tommy gasped. "Oh, *fuck*. He'll kill him oh my gods."

"I'm sorry! I'm so sorry, Tommy! He tricked me." Charlie let out a wail that Tommy had to press him into his shoulder to stifle. The kid was shaking so hard he could feel his teeth chatter against his collarbone. His tears started up again if they'd ever stopped and Tommy held him as tight as he could even when he could feel Charlie's hands dig against his newly-formed scars.

Because gods-be- *damned* he would not let anyone else and especially not *Charlie* blame themselves for something that was Dream's fault. And maybe it was because looking at the boy was like looking at himself. At who he could've been.

“Charlie. *Charlie*, look at me. I’m not mad at you. You couldn’t have known. Manipulation is what Dream *does*. He’s a liar and a good one at that,” Tommy explained as he pulled him back and then let go to tug at the back of his shirt. “He’s the one who did *this* to me. Did he hurt you?”

Charlie shook his head.

“H-he threw me on the ground and tried to kick me but he missed...I- I thought he was my friend. He was right, I’m such an *idiot*, I sh- should’ve listened to my dad. I should’ve listened—“ Charlie pushed back Tommy’s hands to bury his face back in his shoulder.

He understood Techno’s rage now. Tommy never considered himself one for violence, but this? He yearned for the sound of his cast iron cracking against bone. *I’ll kill him myself or die trying.*

“It’s not your fault. None of this is your fault, okay?” Tommy promised and then sucked in a breath as he realized what he needed to do. Tommy reached back and took his compass off. He gently thumbed against the engraving of Tubbo’s name and swallowed harshly. *Sorry, Tubbo.*

He settled the necklace onto Charlie instead who tilted his head up, confused. “W-What? What are you—“

“If I take anyone with me he’ll kill Wil and I can’t risk Tubbo or Ranboo following me.”

“You’re going alone?! Tommy, no! You can’t—“ Charlie raised his voice in distress and Tommy was quick to shush him before another guard heard them.

“I won’t be alone. Not exactly...” Tommy trailed off a moment looking around to be sure no one else was listening. “Charlie, I need a headstart. I know nothing will stop my family. I know the moment Niki realizes I’m not coming she’ll tell Techno and Phil and I can’t outrun them. Inevitably one of them will catch up to me. Just...give me thirty minutes and then go find Technoblade. Give him the note and this...”

He pressed his brother’s earring into the boy’s palm. Charlie shook his head, distraught as he tried to give it back. He knew it was in safe hands though.

“But what if...what if he hurts you again! I don’t want you to get hurt.” Charlie sniffled, his bottom lip trembling and bitten raw. Tommy smiled sadly.

“Don’t worry about me. I’ll be ready for a fight this time. I’ll be okay,” Tommy lied. “And if I time it right...my family won’t be far behind. Trust me. Techno might be our only chance, but he won’t let me go if I wait for him. I need to get ahead of him.”

Everything he knew about fighting he’s learned from Dream. He had some experience from Sam and Techno but not much. Techno couldn’t even raise his sword at him without looking sick. Dream could easily overpower him, he knew that...but Techno, Techno was more capable than anyone.

Yes, he had told Techno that Dream could kill him but only because he didn’t want him to go and fight for him. But now he needed him to fight for him...because it wasn’t just his life at stake, but Wil’s too.

Someone your size should prioritize speed and agility. Think before you attack as you did earlier. Take into account your opponent's size and utilize it to your advantage.

Techno’s words rang in his mind. He was fast. And if there’s one thing Tommy can do...it’s stall for time. He’d have to if he wanted to make it out of this alive.

Charlie frowned and looked down at the earring. With a loud sniffle he tucked it and the note in his pocket. Then he flung himself at Tommy again, scrambling up in his hold till he could wrap his arms around his neck. Tommy held him tight knowing deep down he’d likely never see the little prankster he’d grown so fond of again.

Eventually, he had to pull away, however much it pained him. He handed Charlie back his glasses and wiped away the tears and snot from his splotchy face with his thumb. “A half-hour, okay? Then you go get Technoblade. I know that’s a long wait and it’ll be scary but this is very important.”

“You have to come back okay? Promise me you and Wilbur will come back.” Charlie’s expression was more serious than Tommy had ever seen, the teen swallowed thickly. “My dad– *Quackity* needs Wilbur...and I need you. You’re my first *real* friend. So promise me–No, *pinkie-promise* me.”

Techno was right. Tommy was an excellent liar. *You're my friend.* Oh, it was getting really difficult now not to cry. Tommy gave a wobbly smile and linked his pinkie with his. "Yeah, I promise."

He gave Charlie one final hug and then sent him off, telling him to take his passageways to avoid the guards.

As soon as he was gone, Tommy turned down to look at the items Dream had left him once more and took a shaky breath. As he stood to his feet he promised himself, *No matter what happens, Wilbur has to come out of this alive.*

Even if it meant his own life.

Making it to the stable is easy. He's learned the way there by now with Techno taking him out on rides every few days. At first, his father wanted to send a full-scale battalion with him, but Tommy was very adamant that he didn't want to be put in a bubble of iron swords and shields. So they compromised on the best swordsman in the empire. But now, without Techno scaring off every guard that dared glance at him longer than a few seconds, avoiding the guards was a pain in the ass. Still, with the help of Dream's map of tunnels, he finds it. The stables were empty as he crept in and Tommy wondered if that was Dream's doing. He really fucking hoped not. He shut the door behind him and wished dearly that he'd worn something warmer. It was too late to turn back now. His cloak would have to be enough.

As he rounded the corner he expected to find Carl and Ossium in their respective stalls but instead, he nearly ran headfirst into Ossium's snout. Tommy jolted and bit back a yelp as he tried to restart his heart for what felt like the third time today. Tommy nudged the horse back as he looked over his shoulder to make sure no one had heard him. Quackity's horse whined and gently grabbed his sleeve with his teeth to tug him along. "*Ah –Ossium, hold on, I–*"

And then he paused, Ossium was saddled up already. Wilbur's voice echoed in his ears, "*...I need to saddle up Ossium before I go get Charlie.*"

His stomach curled and he tried to stifle the bubble of fear and distress lodged in his throat. He couldn't lose Wilbur. *He couldn't.* His older brother that would trace his thumb soothingly over that spot from his temple to his hairline to help him sleep. His brother that sung him silly songs and recounted to him stories of their shared youth when he couldn't remember. His brother whose last words to him had been that he was *proud* of him. Wilbur had everything to live for now more than ever. Tommy wouldn't be able to live with himself if Wilbur died for him. Ossium stopped briefly in his attempts to drag Tommy along to bump his snout against his chest. Tommy's lower lip

wobbled and he petted the horse comfortingly for a long moment before he remembered he was on a time crunch.

Tommy brushed back Ossium's mane slightly and spoke as calmly as he could, "Someone took Wil. We need to go back to my tower, to that big cliff you went to last time. He's going to hurt him. Will you take me there, Ossium?"

He heard Carl, who was stuck in his pen, neigh in what sounded like protest, but Ossium stared at the teen a long moment and Tommy prayed he could see the panic in his eyes. And then Ossium was moving himself in position so Tommy could saddle up. Usually, he had Techno help him up but that *clearly* wasn't an option right now. He was just about to attempt to pull himself up when an unfamiliar voice called out.

"You're going to get me and a whole lot of other people in trouble if you do that, Your Highness."

Tommy's attention snapped towards the voice and a girl close to his own age glared back at him with a brush in hand and a scowl on her face. Tommy swallowed. He *seriously* didn't have time for this. "Give them my apologies then and please leave. I'm the prince, right? Tell them I ordered you to let me go."

The girl's scowl only deepened and Tommy didn't think it suited her. Her long dirty blond hair hung loosely over her shoulders and she crossed her arms, irritated by his answer. She questioned, "What do you think you are doing?"

Tommy fingers twitched against Ossium's saddle. He needed to go. He *needed to go now*. He racked through his brain, quickly searching for an excuse. "I uh—I'm meeting my brother out in the square. Ossium knows the way better than me."

The girl squinted at him critically, unimpressed as she came up to pet Ossium's nose. Clearly, the horse was familiar with her because he immediately nuzzled his head into her shoulder happily. Her head snapped up to Tommy again as she hissed, "Try again. This time the truth will do."

"Will you just—" Tommy began, exasperated.

“I wonder if the guards would believe you? Maybe we should ask...?” The girl threatened, and Tommy could tell she was *deadly serious*. She pulled away, starting for the big double doors that led outside and Tommy panicked.

His hand shot forward and he grabbed her arm, stopping her. “*Wait, wait, wait*, please. I—I’m sorry, please, *please*, don’t tell anyone.”

The girl’s blue eyes softened at that and then she demanded, “*The truth*. I don’t care if you’re our fancy new prince. I hate being lied to.”

Tommy decided he’d rather not get on her bad side more than he already had. “Come with me.”

Tommy looked around once more for any guards and then took her hand to tug her into an empty stall. He shut the door and then turned back to where she was waiting expectantly for one hell of a good answer. Tommy had no idea how to explain this simply so he rambled instead, “Listen, I’ve got maybe twenty minutes before they hunt my ass down to stop me, and Dream—the *guy* who kidnapped me—yes, *that guy*—has my brother. He has Prince Wilbur. And if I don’t go after him he’ll kill him. You have to let me go.”

“*Oh*—” The girl choked out, her face had gone pale. Her voice, once harsh, was now as shaky and panicked as his own. “That’s not—I wasn’t expecting a good excuse. That’s a *really* good excuse, crap. I—” She shook her head, clearly shaken by the sudden severity of it all. Her eyes flickered rapidly between him, the door, and his satchel around his waist. Her head suddenly shot up, blue eyes wide. “We should tell the guards. We should—”

She turned and grabbed the stall handle as if she was about to run and Tommy practically threw himself in front of the door. He pleaded with her, “No, no, no, no, please don’t. You can’t tell the guards, please.”

“But—But they can help—” she nearly yelled. She stammered while trying to find the words to reason with the prince. “They—They’ll know what to do! You can’t go by yourself.”

“There’s no time, if I bring anyone Dream will kill Wilbur. He will. If anyone is with me he will kill him. Please...” Tommy felt tears begin to build up as his voice broke, “I am *begging* you.”

Her grip loosened on the handle and she slowly let her hand fall. Tommy took a deep breath, perhaps the first one he'd taken since Charlie had given him that letter and begged him to breathe. The girl looked down at their hands which Tommy hadn't realized he'd never let go of. He was about to jolt his back and apologize until the girl squeezed it comfortingly in her own before letting go. She sighed and said, "Okay...okay...I won't say anything. But you won't make it out of those gates with the guards out there patrolling. Ossium is fast but not fast enough to outrun a squadron."

The sound of Ossium snorting in offense nearly made him laugh, but instead, the noise strangled in his throat.

"Will you help me?" Tommy asked. His hands shook and he bit into his already abused cheek harshly. His mouth tasted of copper but it felt like ash in his mouth. *I don't have time. I'm running out of time. Please, please, please.* "Please."

"I...I can *try* to create a distraction but I can't guarantee anything," she suggested. Anything that could get him to Wilbur faster. He nodded graciously to her.

"I'll take it. Even if it doesn't work it'll still stall them. That's all I need."

"Well...let's hope I can pull off the damsel-in-distress act..." The girl winced and then shook out her hair and smudged some dirt on her cheek and hands.

It took a moment but Tommy was able to hoist himself onto Ossium's saddle. "Thank you. *Thank you*. I-What's your name?"

"Molly," she said warmly. "When you hear me scream a second time, *go*. Good luck, Your Highness."

"Tommy," he replied. "You helped me. Just call me Tommy."

"Tommy, then. Oh! Wait here take this..." Molly turned for a moment to dig something out from her satchel. She pressed a potion of invisibility into his hand. Her expression twitched with what looked like concern. "I use these to slip away from my parents to go riding but I think you'll find a better use for it. Just in case you find yourself in trouble. Uh-Don't die, okay?"

“I’ll try my best, milady,” Tommy assured her with a fake smile. He graciously took the potion, knowing it definitely would come in handy to sneak inside his old home.

“My lady,” Molly corrected with a small laugh. When Tommy tilted his head, confused she said, “Nobles...princes say ‘my lady’. *When* you get back you’ll have to work on that.”

Tommy smiled once more and this time it was real. “Very well, *my lady*.”

Needless to say, Molly was quite the actress and Tommy was able to flee the castle just as the sky began to rumble and the wind warned of a brewing storm. As he crossed the bridge into the forest, Tommy pulled up his hood and patted the horse's bony neck. “Alright, Ossium. *Let’s see how fast you can run.* ”

“You guys *seriously* need to make up your mind,” Techno complained as he continued to sharpen his sword. Chat often liked to shout names but this was a little much even for them. He stood to his feet from where he’d been resting by the base of his mother’s statue as he often did on cloudy days like today. It was the only place where he felt somewhat close to her. Even if just in memory. Techno threw out his arms. “Who? Who do you want? Because we just saw like half of those people.”

Willbur.
Tommy.
Theseus. Will.
Charlie. Quackity.
Willbur.
Tommy! Willbur.

He sighed when they continued to whisper scattered names in the back of his mind where it was most irritating and sheathed his sword in his belt. Fine. If they weren't going to be clear then Techno would ignore them. He was sick of their cryptic bullshit. He didn't have time to deal with them anyway, he had work to catch up on or maybe a nap to take. The latter sounded much more appealing. He left the garden just as the first drops of rain landed on his cheeks and a roll of thunder grumbled lowly across the sky. There would be no crows in the sky today.

He was near his room when the sound of shuffling made his ears twitch. Chat whispered in warning as he scanned the hall with a frown. There weren't guards patrolling their hall during this time. He'd told the two posted in the hall to take a break while he was out in the gardens. After all, it wasn't like he needed someone to protect him. Something shifted again and Techno's hand sprang to the butt of his sword. He was ready to growl for the stranger to reveal themselves when he saw the tip of a child's boot peak out from behind a large potted plant. His stance relaxed as he called, "I see you. Come on out."

He heard the kid inhale sharply and then after a moment, they poked out from their hiding spot. Techno let go of his sword and sighed, "Charlie...what are you doing up here?"

The boy didn't look at him, his eyes were glued to the floor. He was ready to scold him for ditching Wilbur when he heard Chat screaming at him to *pay attention*. He squinted as he got a good look at the kid.

*Something is wrong.
It's wrong... Wrong.
Listen ... and look.*

His boots were stained with dried mud, his knees were scraped and bloodied and his lenses' were cracked. Something was tightly clenched in his fist. He was silent as a mouse but he trembled borderline violently. Techno shifted uncomfortably. He was not good with small crying kids. He was definitely not good at comforting them. At the very least he was extremely rusty. He winced at the awkwardness of his tone as he asked, "Uh...you okay, kid?"

*Not okay...
He's not alright.
Look. Look. Listen.
Wrong. This is wrong.
Look at him, techno.
Listen to him, techno.*

Gods above, will you guys shut up?

He took a step towards him and Charlie flinched and stumbled back a few feet. He felt the first hint of dread stir in his gut. Chat was right...something was *wrong*. Charlie was afraid of him. Well... maybe not *him* directly, but he was clearly afraid of something. So why was he here and not with Quackity? Techno wasn't exactly a comforting presence.

Wilbur.

Wilbur.

Wilbur.

And then Chat's chanting suddenly made a lot more sense. They'd been warning him the whole time. Techno's eyes widened as something else clicked. Chat had said more than just Wilbur and Charlie's names. *Tommy and Quackity.*

Charlie is supposed to be with Wilbur. They were supposed to go riding.

Charlie is hurt and by himself. Charlie is crying.

Wilbur would never leave Charlie alone like this.

Wilbur is not with Charlie. He's not here.

Chat's panicked thoughts melded coherently with his own as the very obvious question rang endlessly in his mind.

Where is Wilbur?

"It's okay," Techno slowly knelt more to the boy's level. Charlie lifted his head and he sucked in a sharp breath at his splotchy tear-stained face. He tried to make his voice as gentle as possible as he soothed, "Hey, it's okay. It's me. It's Technoblade. I'm not gonna hurt you, Charlie. You know me."

Charlie took a few deep breaths to calm himself and then he wiped his eyes and nodded. Yet, not a single sound fell from his lips and it was terrifying. Techno slowly moved to kneel in front of the boy. "Can you tell me what happened?"

Charlie's face went pale and his green eyes widened in terror and Techno immediately backtracked, "Alright, alright. Different approach. Deep breaths, kid. Are you hurt?"

Charlie shook his head.

"Did you get into another fight with Quackity and Wilbur?"

Charlie shook his head again, the names sent more tears streaming down his cheeks.

Techno's fingers pulled against strands of his pink hair, an old nervous habit. He then asked, "What's in your hand?"

Charlie's front crumbled and he wrapped his free arm tightly around himself. He was mouthing something wordlessly. *I'm sorry*. Techno nodded. "Alright, you can't talk right now? That's okay. That's normal when you're scared. I used to be like that too, yeah? Alright, buddy, I think we should go find Quackity and Wilbur. How's that sound?"

Charlie stiffened and he looked like he was desperately trying to say something but just couldn't find the courage to get it out. Finally, Charlie grabbed Techno's sleeve and pressed something into his hand.

Techno let out a choked sound and Charlie buried his face into his tiny hands. He didn't even have to look to know what it was. How could he when he had the matching one?

Techno scooped the boy unceremoniously into his hold, causing him to jolt in fear. Yet again, he didn't make so much as a peep. Techno ran through the hall with Charlie hanging onto him, his teary face buried in his shoulder. He sprinted past all the guards who called out in concern, ignoring them all. When he burst into the kitchen Quackity's staff exclaimed in surprise. Not that he paid them any mind as he was pushing back the sliding door before they could even acknowledge their prince or their kitchen boy.

He rounded the corner and his breath caught at the muddied boot prints smearing the wood floor. *The trail is maybe an hour old*. Techno shifted Charlie into one arm and flung open the door to Quackity and Charlie's apartment.

It was lucky the door opened outwards for if not Techno surely would've slammed it into the figure lying unconscious right at the threshold. Techno sucked in a gasp at the sight of Quackity slumped face down into the ground. From what he could gather from his position it seemed as if Quackity had been trying to crawl to open the door but had lost the strength to pick himself up. Once again, Chat began crying out but not for the clearly injured man, whom Techno knew they cared for but instead for his twin.

WWWW.

WWWW.

WWWW.

And then the voices fell apart into an incoherent panic that Techno didn't have the time to decipher. Charlie immediately began squirming in his hold, crying out soundlessly to reach him.

Techno knelt to the ground with a silent gasp and released Charlie. Techno shifted his hands under the man and rolled Quackity on his back. His head flopped limply to the side and Charlie crawled over and propped his guardian's head into his lap. He shook at his shoulder without so much as a sound though the distress was visible as it was heartbreaking.

No, no, no, no, no—

Techno grabbed his shoulder and shook at him as well albeit rougher, mostly out of panic. "Don't you dare, wake up! Come on, Quackity. Don't be dead. You do not want me taking care of Charlie. I'm shit with kids."

As if appalled by the thought the chef scrunched up his face in pain and shifted. But before relief could set in, Techno noticed the cut on his neck and his blood ran cold. "Wil..." Quackity mumbled as he came to.

Wil. Where is Wilbur?

"Quackity? Quackity, wake up, where is Wilbur!?" he repeated aloud.

Charlie whined, the first audible noise he'd made since Techno had found him and Quackity's eyes shot open. His vision swam disoriently but he knew what he was searching for. He tilted his head back and spotted Charlie. Quackity let out a cry as his face twisted into pain and relief all mixed in one.

Quackity immediately reached out blindly, his movements were sluggish and twitchy. He had been drugged, heavily. Techno felt his heart pound in his chest and Chat was beginning to grow uncontrollably loud in their panic. Techno willed them to be quiet for a moment.

"Char—*Charlie...*" Quackity slurred and Techno helped him upright till he could lean against the wall.

Charlie mouthed a word but once again no sound came out, not even for Quackity. The boy burst into tears and pushed himself into Quackity's arms who sucked in a shaky breath and held him like someone might rip him out of his arms if he let go. "Mijo. *Mijo*. Te tengo, *mi limo pequeño*," The chef wept and it was startling. The last time Techno remembered seeing Quackity cry was the day Sapnap and Karl had left him.

But that had merely been pain and tears...this...this was *grief*. This was immobilizing heartbreak that shook you to the bone. Quackity's sobs into Charlie's shoulder reminded him far too much of his own father's cries when they'd lost his mother and Tommy.

It was mournful.

Charlie clutched onto his shirt tightly as Quackity cradled him to his chest and pressed kisses against his brow. "You're okay...You're okay," Quackity murmured mostly to himself.

"*Dad*," Charlie finally managed to get out, his voice quiet and wrecked. Quackity buried his face into his hair.

"I- I've got you. I've got you. I'm here," Quackity promised. His arms were still twitching and weak from whatever drug he'd been injected but his hold was assuredly unbreakable. After a moment, Quackity said, "Did he hurt you? C-Charlie, did he--"

Charlie shook his head firmly against Quackity's shoulder before curling further against him, no longer open to questions for a few minutes.

"His knees are scraped up," Techno said and Quackity's eyes shot up as if just now realizing Techno was there too. Techno gave an assuring nod.

"Other than that, he seems just very upset. Quackity--" Techno's voice caught a moment, as he asked, "*What happened?*"

Quackity squeezed his eyes shut and let his head fall back against the wall in clear anguish. He sucked in a gasp of air as he explained, "He took him. The guy you've been hunting for. The bastard who hurt Tommy. He took Wilbur."

And then Chat's near deafening cries went silent and a voice he was all too familiar with slithered out from his cage to pour poison into his ears. **"I warned you, didn't I?"**

Chaos has Wilbur.

Quackity yanked at his sleeve, grabbing back his attention. His eyes were more focused now as he explained, "He's gonna fucking kill him, Techno. He used Charlie to get to me and then used me as leverage against him. He said Wilbur could take Tommy's place for some ritual or something. That it was either him or both of us and Tommy. So Wilbur went with him. Techno—Tech he..."

Quackity let out another cry of pain while Techno just stared at him in fear and disbelief. Though he knew what was happening was horrifically real. "You have to s -stop him, Techno. *He'll kill him.* I couldn't do anything, he caught me by surprise and then I was too fucking out of it to stop him."

Let me in. You need my help.

Not fucking yet I don't.

Foolish boy. Very well, I can wait. I've waited this long after all.

"Technoblade! For fuck's sake say something!" Quackity yelled, his fear making him frustrated. "He's gonna get himself killed!"

Charlie's head shot up, panicked again suddenly. Quackity briefly turned his attention back to console him but Charlie was frantically digging through his pockets, searching for something. Finally, he fished a crumbled note from his pocket and shoved it into Techno's hands. It was only then, just before he opened the note, that he finally noticed the compass around Charlie's neck.

That's Tommy's... Oh gods.

He slowly looked down to read the note and then his terror morphed to rage. He growled lowly, "He's not after Wilbur. He's baiting Tommy and he'll kill them both without hesitation. Charlie, look at me."

His tone was much harsher than he'd meant it and Charlie buried his face back into Quackity's chest with a frightened whimper. Techno took a breath and ignored the glare Quackity gave him as he apologized, "Charlie. I'm not mad at you. Come on out."

Reluctantly Charlie pulled back but he was shaking when he met his gaze. Techno tried to keep his voice gentle like before but with every passing moment, it was getting more difficult to control himself. He had never been this angry before and it scared him. "How long ago did you give this to Tommy?"

Charlie looked to Quackity who nodded to him but the kid looked white as a sheet. Charlie tried his best but something was clearly scaring him so badly that he couldn't muster the courage. Rage boiled in his gut as he realized he'd probably been threatened into silence.

Techno hummed nervously as he tried to think of a workaround to the issue. And then Chat eagerly whispered his solution and he sighed shakily. His sign was extremely rusty but that was the only thing he could think of. He prayed Charlie still remembered what he'd known when he'd first been found by Quackity. Back then Charlie had been extremely hard of hearing till Tubbo had figured out a way to help him. Even now, Techno could see the aids curled in his ear.

"Still remember your sign, kid? From when you were little?" Techno asked and Charlie's eyes widened in realization. And then the boy's hands were moving so fast he could hardly keep up with him.

"...He told me to wait a half hour to tell you—" Charlie signed, the shake in his hands making his gestures slightly uncoordinated. Techno's heart sank.

Shit that means he's probably closer to an hour ahead already.

Charlie paused a moment to wipe his teary eyes and then continued, "I only waited fifteen minutes. I could not wait anymore. He is gonna get hurt. I do not want that to happen. He is my friend."

Oh, thank the gods. Techno slowly reached so as not to scare him and ruffled his hair. Charlie flinched anyway but Techno knew it wasn't because of him. That realization only made him more enraged. Still, he had to hold it together a little longer. "Good. You did so good, kid. Now I need

you to stay here and keep an eye on Q. It won't be long before Tubbo will try to use the compass and find you two and I have to get out of here before they lock down the palace... *again.*"

"What are you going to do?" Quackity asked, pulling Charlie close when he curled back into him. And then his face fell at the immediate realization. "You're going alone."

Techno shrugged as if it had been obvious. *It had.* "I'm not putting anyone else at risk and I sure as hell am not letting anyone get in my way. I can track better than anyone and I already know where I'm going. And hopefully this storm will keep Phil from going after us. I doubt Puffy could stop him this time."

"Did you ever consider the idea that—oh I don't know— *The Angel of Death could fucking help you?!?*"

"Chaos killed him once before," Techno said lowly. He shivered as he recalled the sound of the sword being buried in his father's gut while Tommy screamed. It was just as clear as it had been so long ago. Techno shook his head. "I won't let that happen again. I'm not putting another person I love in danger."

There was no time to argue and frankly, Quackity wasn't exactly in a position to stop him.

The chef looked conflicted but ultimately let his head thud back against the wall. He took a sharp breath and then his hand came up to grip tightly against Techno's tunic before Techno could pull away. His eyes were filled with grief as he demanded even when his voice broke, "You bring him back, Techno. You fucking hear me? You bring him back to me."

Techno nodded. "I will."

Quackity looked down at Charlie and swallowed, "Both of them. Bring back Theseus too or I'll kick your ass."

"You too." A small voice piped, shaky and nervous. It hardly sounded like Charlie at all." Charlie turned his head just enough to peek at Techno. The boy whispered, "Come back too."

Techno nearly jumped at the way Chat aww'd in response. *Not the time, guys.*

And yet it was only for the kid that he cracked a hint of a smile and assured him, "You don't need to worry about me kid. I'm quite tough to kill."

You are mortal, boy. My sister will not save you a second time, try as she might. Your life is as forfeit as your siblings if you face Chaos unaided and distracted by your fear.

Get out of my head.

Charlie furrowed his brow and then cautiously reached out to point at the streak of white in his hair. Techno's eyes widened in shock and his heart clenched painfully. His response turned to ash in his mouth. How Charlie knew about *that* was anyone's guess but the reminder haunted him as he pulled away wordlessly from the two.

Just as he grabbed the door handle, Quackity growled sharply, "Tear that green motherfucker to pieces, Techno. For what he did to my kid and for all the rest of it."

Techno's expression twisted into something dark. His eyes flashed a bloody red as he growled, "With pleasure."

Techno shut the door behind him and no one dared stop him as he charged towards the stable. He spotted Carl, who was restless in his pen, practically urging him to hurry. He placed a shaky hand against his mane to not only calm him but himself. He saddled up in record time and just as he was about to leave, he spotted a girl staring at him from the shadows. She was covered in dirt with an apology in her eyes that was moments away from spilling from her lips. She must have been too terrified to speak because instead she ran to shove open the gate for him and fled back into the castle.

He easily outran the guards who were scrambling to mount their horses and began the long chase after his little brother.

Leaves and rain whipped against his face as Ossium raced through the forest. He was almost there, he could feel it. They had been running for the better half of an hour with Tommy feeding Ossium

golden carrots he found to keep the horse going. And while he struggled to see with the rain, Ossium seemed to have no problem other than the occasional slide against the slick mud. As they raced through the forest, he could hear crows cawing out at him. As if his mother was warning him not to do the frankly stupid thing he was about to do.

It wasn't like he had much of a choice. He reached down to fumble through his satchel and spotted the pearl.

Dream had once given him a book on the End that he claimed he'd found during one of his many excursions. It talked all about the creatures and civilizations that had existed before something had sent it all to ruin. He hadn't been sure then what exactly had happened since conveniently all the pages on the Dragon had been torn from the book. Dream had just claimed it was because it was old and moth-eaten, but now he knew better.

Regardless, it had mentioned ender pearls, strange orbs that fell when an enderman had been slain. Tommy swallowed as bile rose in his throat and tried to push away the image of Ranboo on the sharp end of a blade. He shook his head, the point was if you threw a pearl, you would teleport to wherever it landed. And from what Wilbur had told him when he'd recounted just how they had found him, the quickest way to the tower was down a large cliff.

Tommy could only hope the pearl would land on the ground and not a tree or gods-forbid a *river*. There would be no one to save him this time if he drowned. Suddenly Ossium whined in warning and Tommy whipped his head around as he heard the thunderous sound of a horse charging not far behind.

"*Fuck—*" Tommy swore. "Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

"Theseus!" Techno yelled, and Tommy gasped as he urged Ossium forward. He could see the cliff edge now. So close. He was so fucking *close*.

It was far too early for Techno to be this caught up, which meant Charlie probably hadn't waited as he'd asked. He sighed. He supposed he couldn't blame him. It had been a lot to ask of him. Tommy warned frantically, "Go, Ossium! Go, almost there!"

"Tommy, stop!" Tommy turned and yelped. Techno was maybe thirty feet behind him and catching up quickly. Ossium lept over a fallen tree and a branch sliced at his cheek. He hardly noticed as he saw the tree line.

“Don’t try to stop me!” Tommy screamed, the rain drowning out his voice. His hair clung to his forehead and his clothes were drenched as his entire body shook from the cold.

“We can work through this together! You’re gonna get yourself killed!” Techno yelled back, his hand already stretched out ready to grab Ossium by the reins.

“I can fucking do this!” Tommy pleaded, the wind blinding him briefly. “Trust me!”

Techno didn’t answer as he ushered Carl faster and Tommy had to act fast or his plan would be ruined. He snatched the pearl from his satchel just as they exited the treeline and then yanked hard on Ossium’s reins. He sputtered apologies to the horse.

Ossium cried out and then Tommy was clinging onto his neck as he made a jarring stop and reared back. “Shit!” He heard Techno growl and as Ossium landed back on his hooves, Tommy dove off the horse. Tommy’s frying pan dug into his stomach and he let out a strangled gasp as the wind was knocked from his lungs and one of his ribs cracked from the hard metal digging into him as he slammed into the ground. He gave himself five seconds to recover from the blinding pain and then he turned back to see Techno rearing Carl as well before he could trample the boy. Tommy scampered onto his knees and urged himself back on his feet. He pushed through the pain as he stumbled to his feet and made a dead sprint towards the cliffside.

Please land on the ground. Please land on the ground.

“Tommy, don’t!” Techno screamed as he spotted the pearl in Tommy’s hand. He jumped off Carl and was running after him, with some strange contraption half slung across his back, but it was too late. Tommy skidded to a stop as he hurled the pearl as far as he could off the edge. His feet dug in the mud and he fell backward onto the ground. He kicked his legs out when they slid off the edge and he was left half dangling over the cliffside. And yet he breathed out a sigh of relief. He’d done it. He’d made it. Another second passed before Techno’s hands dug under his shoulders to haul him back over the side and onto to his feet. He pulled him into his arms and Tommy pressed his nose into his chest for a brief moment before Techno yanked him back to grab his face and beg, “Kid, hold onto me. Grab onto me! Theseus!”

Tommy shook his head and looked up at his brother before smiling with melancholy spilling from his lungs. “It’s gonna be alright, Tech,” he prayed and Techno’s pleas to hold onto him faded away

as a cluster of purple swirled around him. He felt Techno's hands dig into him and Tommy simply basked at the warmth his brother brought him. "I'll see you there."

The pearl landed and he was ripped violently from Techno's arms and torn from reality. His body felt like he was being unraveled and sewn back together as he teleported hundreds of feet to the forest below.

He landed, and then he was running. The crows were deafening.

Chapter End Notes

we're in the endgame now lads.

see you for the finale.

The Tear Heals

Chapter Notes

yes yes ik there's an extra chapter dw it won't be another 3 months promise. gimme like a week bc rn I'm ill and have a crap ton of work.

This chapter was beta-read by my lovely @arbitersart <3 (special thanks for helping me with some of the descriptions towards the end<33333)

TW: Major Character Death (ok now BREATHE), Blood and Gore, Emotional and Physical Abuse, Violence, etc.

Basically strap in and hold on this is gonna get ROUGH

Word Count: 11.7k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Phil, I—“

Phil lurched forward and then fisted the front of Puffy’s cloak threateningly. “Do not be so naive to think I won’t throw your ass in a cell, *Captain*. You forget yourself.”

Phil pulled away and Puffy smartly stepped back. Phil shook his wings from his back and stretched them out above the two in all their wonder. Puffy stared at the white patch in Phil’s wings.

He heard Schlatt huff from behind them. There was no humor in his tone. “I wouldn’t if I were you.”

Puffy was quiet for a moment, looking rather pale. Finally, she sighed, “To be honest, I like my job and I’d rather keep it. And while the Captain in me says stay, the mother in me says get your ass in the air and bring them home.”

“Good answer,” Phil hissed sharply as he looked to the sky, it was now pouring rain and thunder boomed in the sky sending lightning crashing down. Flying in a storm like this was a terrible idea, but what else was he meant to do? His kids were in trouble and he didn’t plan to sit around and twiddle his thumbs.

“Just stay as low as you can,” Puffy asked and Phil nodded stiffly before he flapped his wings with tremendous force, so much so that it sent Puffy stumbling back a foot or two. Without another word, he launched himself into the sky and soared off into the stormy clouds.

Puffy huffed beneath her breath, “Stubborn man.”

His lungs were burning as Tommy sprinted through the forest. He couldn't help but notice how different the forest felt around him now. The first time he'd passed through these trees he had been nervous but the forest had felt so warm and welcoming. Like it had been waiting for him. But now? Now the ground was slick beneath his boots and the rain had drenched him head to toe. The wind roared through the trees so hard that Tommy could see the roots of certain trees fight for their home in the ground. They swayed and bent dangerously to the will of the storm while twigs and leaves marked up his face.

Tommy stumbled slightly as his foot caught a branch but he caught himself on a nearby tree. The crows. The crows were screaming from their hidden spots in the trees...or maybe he was just fucking crazy.

Tommy kept running. The damp map Dream had given him was shaking in his hands and his teeth chattered. He could be dead in an hour. He could be dead and dumped in some unmarked grave or used for some fucked up ritual in an hour. Wilbur or Techno could be dead. He was on the cusp of losing everything he'd just gotten back and he was so *scared* ...but he couldn't turn back to Techno now.

By the time he reached the ivy wall that had hidden him away for so many years, his heart was pounding in his chest. There was a part of him that dreaded even stepping foot back in that tower, even if it was for Wilbur. There was a sense of finality to it. A terrible certainty that if he went back in he'd never come back out. It crept up his neck, coiling around it like a snake.

And yet, he brushed back the ivy vines that had been his curtain from the world and walked back into his nightmare. He looked up at the tower and took a shuddering breath. With the storm raging around him, there was a sinister air to it that hadn't been there before.



Dream had already released the ladder down. He had been waiting for him. *He's probably waiting to jump me the moment I go inside.*

It was only then that he remembered the invisibility potion tucked away in his pack, given to him by the demanding girl at the stables. And yet despite the hassle of that interaction he couldn't help but be ever so grateful for her help. *Thank you. You may just save me yet.*

He fished the item from his bag and did the math in his head. *Three minutes. I have three minutes to free Wilbur, take Dream out, or figure out how to distract him long enough for Techno to find me.*

No pressure.

Tommy strapped his frying pan tightly to his waist and popped off the cork of the potion. The bitter smell of magic made him wince. He had to do it now, either now or risk Dream spotting him on the way up. The rain whipped around him and Tommy swallowed nervously. It would be really fuckin' anti-climactic if he fell to his death now. Tommy tipped the bottle back, letting the contents of the bottle drain into his mouth and down the hatch. A strange chill washed over him and he felt his hands tingle.

There was no time however to explore the strange sensation. Instead, he hopped onto the ladder with one shaky foot and began his treacherous climb up the rickety ladder as quickly as he dared. The ladder swayed with the wind and Tommy whimpered as he felt his feet slide precariously against the aged bark.

"Oh *fuck this*," Tommy gasped and adjusted his grip. He had no time to be a wimp so with a deep breath he hooked one arm around a rung above while the other hand gripped the rope tight. He tried to go as fast as he could but he was also really trying not to fucking fall. Each time he felt his boots slide against the lower rungs he yelped in terror, but somehow he made it, and the potion still had over a minute left.

Tommy held his breath as he perched atop the window ledge. *Now or never.* He clutched the emerald around his neck and climbed back inside his tower.

As soon as his feet hit the cold tile he sucked in a gasp as he looked ahead.

His arms were chained to one of the tower beams and his eyes bore into the wall with a haunted stare. His face was almost devoid of emotion, but Tommy could still see never-ending grief in his eyes. Wilbur sat there, head tilted back towards the wall, entirely motionless beside his chest that heaved in the air as if he was terrified that at any moment he'd breathe his last breath. Wilbur was scared but at the same time, he had accepted that. He accepted that he was going to die for Tommy. The thought made the teen's stomach curl.

Tommy looked around but there was no one else in the living area besides him and Wilbur. So he ran until he fell to his knees, sliding them harshly against the stone the rest of the way. Wilbur

jolted harshly and Tommy slapped a hand to his mouth to muffle the cry of alarm. Wil thrashed against it forcing Tommy to drop it before the chains around his wrists began to rattle. “Wil. Wilbur shut up! It’s me!”

“Tommy?” Wilbur whispered and then suddenly he appeared horrified. His face twisted up in agony and he cried quietly, “No, no, no Toms you can’t be here. You’re not supposed to be here.”

“Shut up,” Tommy hissed and snatched Wilbur’s wrists, he grabbed the piano wire from his pocket and hastily molded it into a lockpick before jabbing it into the socket. He tried not to rush himself in his search for the pins to unlock the chains keeping his brother hostage.

“He’ll kill you—!” Wilbur tried again and Tommy pulled away from the lock to slap his hand back over the idiot’s mouth.

“We’ll both be dead if you don’t shut the fuck up!” He couldn’t waste more time than he already had. “I’m getting you out of here, okay? Relax, I don’t plan on dying today, and neither should you. Where is Dream?”

And then suddenly the potion’s effects wore off and Tommy watched the way Wilbur’s eyes widened in alarm as he stared over Tommy’s shoulder. Wilbur’s chained hands dug into the front of Tommy’s shirt but it was too late for Tommy even to process what was happening until arms wrapped around his waist and he was snatched from Wilbur’s arms.

Tommy flailed his limbs wildly as he tried to escape. A sinister voice hissed in his ear, “An invisibility potion, huh? I’m almost impressed...but you forgot something~”

Dream turned and grabbed Tommy’s jaw harshly to make him look at the floor. Tommy winced at the muddy bootprints trailing across the stone leading right to where Wilbur was struggling to reach him. *Dammit*. Dream clicked his tongue. “*Tsk tsk*, frivolity has made you messy. Oh, don’t look so disappointed. We all make mistakes, don’t we, Wilbur?”

“Tommy!” Wilbur cried out. His hands stretched awkwardly as he frantically jiggled and turned the makeshift lockpick, searching for the opening.

“Let go of me, you fucking bastard! I’ll fucking kill you! *You motherfuc—*” Tommy slammed back his elbow into Dream’s gut and the man groaned out in pain. His hold slipped and Tommy scrambled out of his grasp, hands flying to the frying pan hooked to his belt and he swiftly brought it up, mimicking the proper stance that Techno had shown him. Dream stepped back and chuckled in amusement. His hood was drawn over his head but the mask he had worn on his birthday was gone.

“Look at you, Your Highness. Outgrown me, have you? Do you think you’ve replaced me? Here’s a secret, Tommy.” Dream’s voice was sickeningly sweet, and he drew his sword from his belt, raising it towards Tommy. Dream smiled. “No matter how hard you try to bury me in your thoughts, you will always be cursed with me. Even in death.”

“You’re a monster,” Tommy’s voice was low and he bared his teeth at him. “A fucking monster. You *maimed* me.”

“Your fate is to die, Tommy. You are meant to die. The gods were warned of it millennia ago, the return of Chaos and the death of their phoenix. It was always inevitable. And whether she wants to or not, Death will do her job.”

“My life is my own. So fuck fate and fuck you,” Tommy rejected calmly, and then like the strike of a match, he swung. Dream barely deflected the blow to the head with his sword. Tommy rolled left before Dream could bring the blade down on top of him.

“That stubbornness always was impossible to drug out of you,” Dream said, ducking when Tommy swung over his head. The teenager immediately leapt back a few feet as Dream charged at him. Tommy turned and launched himself to the side. He spun around and landed a hard blow to Dream’s shoulder. The man groaned in pain and his green eyes flashed at him dangerously. “I’m tired of playing games, Tommy. I’ve run out of patience.”

Oh gods, Techno hurry.

“You owe me this,” Tommy hissed. But Dream swung hard and the impact of the steel sword against cast iron was so violent that it sent Tommy’s weapon flying out of his grasp. Tommy gasped as a hand roughly shoved him back, causing him to stumble onto the cold stone floor. Tommy instantly began to shuffle backward until his back slammed against a wooden beam. He sucked in a terrified breath as Dream stalked towards him, sword in hand ready to cut him down.

This is it. Oh fuck, I'm going to die. I'm gonna die.

Tommy braced himself for the blow, throwing up his hand in front of his face. And as Dream raised his blade to strike him down, he turned his face and waited for the end to come. And in a sense, the end did come...just not the way Tommy expected. Tommy heard the click of a lock and the loud clacking of chains followed by shuffling and a struggle. Wilbur's voice rang angrily throughout the tower, "We had a deal! You don't touch him!"

He heard Dream chuckle, amused and a wave of fear shot through him as the cursed god dragged the edge of his blade gratingly against the stone.

Tommy opened his eyes just to watch helplessly as Dream suddenly dashed forward, seizing Wilbur's shoulder before he could react, and thrust his sword cleanly through Wilbur's abdomen.

Wilbur gasped as the wind was knocked out of him while Dream buried his sword deeper. Wilbur didn't cry out— couldn't, probably, and Tommy just...stared. The ice was back from Limbo, it had to be. It wasn't just holding him in place. He could feel the ice in his lungs, his stomach, *everywhere*. It shot through his veins until it spiked his heart and he gasped. He was so *cold*. So, so *cold* looking at the sword buried into his brother. Tommy watched in abject horror and strange fascination as the light from the midday sun peeked through the window he'd come through. It reflected off the blood dripping down Dream's sword and onto the ground with a strange distorted beauty. Wilbur choked on his own blood, sending rivets of it down his chin onto his coat. *Three minutes. I had three minutes.*

Tommy realized it wasn't ice that he felt. It was fear. Tommy finally let out the scream that had been steadily building in his chest as Dream laughed cruelly, "Oh, Wilbur, it was long past the time to play the hero."

No, no, no, no, no. Tommy screamed again in despair as he stumbled to his feet to reach the two. *Fix him. I have to fix him. I can fix him. I can fix this, please I have to fix him.* Dream grabbed Wilbur by the jaw and tugged his head up to look at him. He grinned. "Y'know...I always thought Tommy carried the family resemblance but I must say...you're a *dead ringer* for your father right now, Wilbur."

"Get away! Get the fuck away!" Tommy yelled and slammed his hands into his side as he tried to push Dream away, but once again he was shoved off, and this time rather violently. He hit the floor hard and groaned as pain spiked through his shoulder.

Dream let Wilbur slide off his sword and to the ground with a loud thud. He tucked it back in his sheath and as Tommy scrambled to Wilbur's side, Dream grabbed him by his long hair and dragged him away. Wilbur rolled onto his side and groaned out a cry as he futilely tried to reach for Tommy.

Tommy was screaming, kicking, and spitting curses until Dream pulled him up to his feet, ripping out bits of hair as he yanked. Before Tommy could even pause to catch his breath, a hand wrapped around his throat, and his air was abruptly cut off. He let out a strangled cry as Dream lifted him effortlessly with one hand and brutally slammed him up against the wall. Tommy's head cracked against the stone and the room spun. The man he'd once called his brother sneered at him. "And as for *you*. Look at what you've done, Tommy."

Tommy dug his nails into Dream's hands as he tried to pry the fingers that were crushing his windpipe off of him. He couldn't breathe.

Tommy choked, "*Fuh—fu..ck*"

"Tommy..." he heard Wilbur faintly groan in fear. Tommy watched helplessly as Wilbur tried to crawl towards him, still trying, even to the end, to save him.

Dream jerked him up in his hold. "I didn't want it to be this way, but you made me do this. I wanted this to be painless and now look, I had to get *messy*. "

His lungs burned and his throat was on fire as he dangled there. Spots began prickling at his vision but he still gritted out, "B-bit...ch—"

Dream simply smiled and his grip grew agonizingly tighter. Tommy's thoughts grew fuzzy as his vision began to fade. The nails he had dug into Dream's skin loosened and his grip began to slacken. Tommy tried desperately to inhale but Dream's grip was near inhuman. He was going to crush his throat. He was going to kill him. Tommy smacked at Dream's arm weakly and begged inaudibly, "P-Please—"

Technoblade, please.

“It’s time to stop fighting me,” Dream said, almost softly, his eyes were a vibrant, nearly *glowing* green. He tucked a strand of Tommy’s hair behind his ear and, using his thumb, swiped away a stray tear from his cheek. Dream spoke quietly with the same gentle tone that once had made Tommy feel safe. Now all it did was terrify him. “Oh, don’t look at me like that, kid. There was never a way to prevent this. You fought hard, but now it’s time to close your eyes and sleep.”

Sleep. That sounds nice. A long nap in his mother’s arms as she carried him away sounded nice.

The moment Tommy’s hands fell limply to his side, a force he couldn’t see ripped Dream off of him. Tommy dropped to the floor, landing hard on his back causing the newly healed scars to cry out once again. He sucked in as much air as he could, ‘til his lungs felt they could burst. He gagged, coughed, and *retched* as he tried to catch his breath. He slowly rolled over onto his side and let his head thud against the cold stone tiles.

There was a yell and then the sickening sound of fist against bone and Tommy flinched slightly at the deafening *crack*. He struggled to open his eyes as his head spun but he couldn’t mistake the sight in front of him. He watched in awe with heaving breaths as Technoblade sent Dream tumbling to the floor with a loud crash. Tommy choked on a sob as he met his older brother’s fuming gaze.

Technoblade was here. His hair and clothes were soaked from the rain and his eyes were a terrifying red. Tommy had never been more relieved and more sorry in his life. Techno was here and Tommy had never seen him look so angry. It rolled off him in waves sending a chill up Tommy’s spine. He would say he almost pitied the target of that anger, but that would be a lie.

While Dream recovered, Techno backed up to guard his brothers and unsheathed his sword from his belt. He turned back briefly and let out a small choked sound as he stared at Wilbur on the floor. Techno swallowed and gritted out shakily, “Theseus?”

I failed you. Tommy’s throat was screaming as he squeaked, “Tech—“

“Get to Wilbur,” he ordered sharply. Tommy simply nodded and with still ringing ears and bloodshot eyes he shakily pulled himself onto his hands and knees and started crawling. The fading ringing in his ears made him sway and his stomach curl but he still froze when he heard Dream laugh. Techno snapped his attention back to Dream as he picked himself up off the ground.

“I must say,” Dream drawled as he raised his hand to pop his jaw back into place without flinching. He smiled crookedly at Techno. “I’ve waited a *long* time to cross swords with you, Blood God.

Technoblade. The little brat that cut open my face.”

“My greatest regret is that I missed your throat,” Techno hissed at him.

Dream briefly turned to spit out blood against the stone floor. He wiped his chin and admitted, “Damn, you sure know how to hit a lot harder now.”

Tommy stood shakily and tried to hook his arms under Wilbur’s shoulders to pull him as far from Dream as he could manage. He’d hardly managed to pull him a foot before another wave of dizziness left him out of breath and panting. He stumbled as his head spun and his legs gave out. Yet somehow, he was still able to slot his knees beneath Wilbur’s head before they fell to the ground. Wilbur let out a pained cry that made Techno’s ears drop and had Tommy breathlessly apologizing.

He wanted to throw up. And he wasn’t sure if it was because he felt like he couldn’t breathe or if it was because he was about to watch Techno and Dream fight to the death. Or if it was because he could feel Wilbur leaning his pale face into his chest.

Dream staggered a moment, dizzy from the blow, and then grabbed the bloodied sword from the ground. He pointed it to Techno menacingly. “This should be a much more even fight this time ‘round. Oh, don’t worry, Tommy. I’ll get back to you, just wait your turn.”

“You will never touch him again,” Technoblade snarled.

“It’s frustrating, isn’t it? To know that I know him better than you ever will,” Dream taunted. “I have known him *longer* after all. I might die today, but Tommy will always be mine.”

*“I will kill you and you will rot in this tower until you’re **e nothing but the carcass of a dying god.**”* Somewhere in his sentence, another voice snaked into Techno’s.

“Ah. **There you are.**” Dream grinned. “Finally, a real fight. A battle of puppets for selfish gods. All for the blood of one little boy.”

"I am nobody's puppet and I'm not here for banter," Techno growled. "The only blood that will be spilled here is yours."

Dream tilted his head back to scoff. "Your twin stands—pardon me *lies there* without a god to save him. He's as defenseless and fragile as any mortal. The runt of the litter, ready to be claimed by death a second time. Is this truly who you meant to make your Emperor if your father croaked? Even Tommy has a god of his own, elusive as they are. Why else would he be blessed with such a gift?"

Techno froze briefly, giving Dream the chance to lunge at him. Techno swerved to the right and swung his blade around till it crashed against Chaos'.

"Your mother kept quite a lot from you, didn't she?" Dream grinned wildly and Techno bared his teeth at him, his eyes were blood red. "When his god made him, they skewed the balance as they did when time began. They brought ruin on my master. What is chaos and destruction when it can be so easily undone by a child?"

"My mother wouldn't keep that from me." Techno bared his teeth.

"Death has no vessel, save her angel," Dream laughed and narrowly dodged another blow, countering it. The sharp sound of steel made Tommy's ears ring. The words vaguely registered but he was too busy trying to staunch the blood pouring from Wilbur's lower abdomen. He willed his hands to save him but no matter how hard he tried, there was still no golden power, just a wisp of what was. The gaping hole in Wilbur's stomach remained and Tommy choked on his grief as Wilbur's blood seeped between his fingers. *I...I can't fix this.*

Dream sneered. "And now look, Wilbur pays the price."

"Stop fucking monologuing so I can kill you already." Techno raised his sword and Tommy watched as his brother disappeared and something else took his place. Techno looked up and grinned. "*Blood God. I accept your deal.*"

Tommy saw the red glow of a handprint appear on Techno's shoulder, the banished god making himself known. Technoblade blinked and then his eyes were just as vibrant and sinister as Dream's. Strange red vines snaked out from the hand and trailed down his shoulder to weave around Techno's right arm. It moved down, entwining his hand to his sword before wrapping itself around the hilt of his sword like a snake. The prince looked at his arm and the strange dark markings that

had been left against his skin, raising his sword up as they began to glow. It wasn't pure and pretty like Tommy's gift. This was hatred and rage coursing through his veins. Blood-red anger.

“You’re a fool to give him power over you,” Chaos warned with a lopsided grin.

Techno was silent, he simply glared daggers into him as he waited for another opening to strike. So Dream continued to taunt him. “He’s going to want something in return, if he doesn’t drive you insane first. It may not be today or even a year or two from now...but one day he will claim his side of the bargain and the price is a steep one.”

“Well if I die, what will it matter?”

“And if not?” Dream asked, ignoring a small opening to strike out of sadistic curiosity.

The prince took it instead, and this time when their blades struck, Dream faltered slightly at his new strength. Techno’s tone was cold but honest, “Then I will meet my consequences gladly.”

“Interesting...” Dream simply huffed in amusement. He raised his sword regardless and the real fight began. **“I’m going to enjoy this.”**

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut and turned to Wilbur just as steel struck steel. His hands shook violently and he flinched with every blow he heard and every grunt of pain. He willed himself still and kept pressing his cloak down on the wound. He was terrified that at any moment he’d lose both of them. And then he felt Wilbur’s hands press atop his own and Tommy looked to see Wilbur staring at the already bruising marks on his neck.

Tommy’s voice was small as he asked, “Why? Why the fuck would you do that? You’re not supposed to fucking die for me. He wanted me!”

“M’not sorry.” Wilbur smiled and hummed sleepily, “For all those years I couldn’t protect you, I get to make it up to you now.”

Tommy swallowed as tears trailed down his cheeks and leaned down to press his face into Wilbur's shoulder. Even as his brother was bleeding out, he still murmured words of comfort and love as his sentences began to slur together.

"I was so fucking *lucky* to be your big brother," Wilbur whispered and shakily lifted his hands to brush away his little brother's tears. Tommy leaned his face further into his palm. "So...lucky."

Meanwhile, Techno and Dream were consumed by their own violent dance. One that Dream was starting to lose. With Chaos, he normally had the strength to take out a full squadron of soldiers and mercenaries by himself. But Technoblade could do that without the Blood God. He was the strongest warrior in the Empire. And with the Blood God fueling his rage, he would not fail. Not this time. Dream may have been able to best Phil a decade ago, but only because he had been disarmed, holding Tommy, and having the most horrible revelation of his life. Dream had used his vulnerability against him, and now that Technoblade had gauged his attack pattern, he realized Chaos was not as invulnerable as he made himself out to be.

As if on cue, Dream growled aloud in frustration as Techno guarded against another blow, the third in a row. And yet he refused to counter him...but he was waiting. Because god or no god, Dream was beginning to tire himself out with the relentless strikes.

The man yelled at him, "Do you plan to fight me or hide behind that fucking sword?"

Technoblade didn't respond. He had purged his face of emotion, leaving Dream unable to gauge his next attack.

Yes, Dream was a fierce opponent, but Dream was also currently leaving his legs unguarded. Tommy's voice echoed in his ears from the day at the training grounds, "*Your legs,*" Tommy answered instantly and Techno hummed. "*You rarely defend them since your sword is usually guarding higher.*"

As Dream tried to match Techno's force, the prince hiked up his boot and kicked him hard in the chest, so hard it sent his opponent sprawling. Techno moved quickly, grabbing Dream by his cloak as he tried to stand, and then as soon as one of his boots was flat on the ground, Techno kicked in Dream's knee with extraordinary force. The crunch beneath his boot and the scream of pain Dream let out was everything he hoped it'd be.

But before Techno could grab at him again, Dream grabbed a dagger from the side of his thigh and slashed at him, barely nicking his side. The man scrambled back even with his dislocated knee and hissed, "If I had known that bitch was that fucking bird I would've strangled her myself, maybe even in front of Tommy to teach him a lesson."

Dream cackled insanely and then slammed his hand against his knee popping it back into place. He hissed in pain and shakily got back on his feet. "I hope she's rotting away whatever abyss the high gods threw her in."

Before the sentence could throw Techno off guard, he felt something tug at his mind. A hand wrapped around the memory of his mother, shielding the pain of Dream's words to keep him focused.

Techno was on him immediately, finally seeing another opening. Dream stumbled back as Techno brutally brought down his weapon, the hilt of his sword beginning to glow. He swung again and Dream's sword shattered against his, scattering shards of steel across the room. Somewhere in the room, a mirror broke.

Dream looked down at his broken blade and Techno could pinpoint the exact moment when Dream realized he was about to lose. In a final act of desperation, Dream took the sword in his hand and tried to stab Techno in the chest, but Techno grabbed his wrist and twisted it back before driving his sword home. A muffled whimper was heard from across the room. *Tommy.*

Dream choked on his own blood that spewed from his mouth as Techno buried his blade through his gut just as Dream had done to his father...and... The man sputtered briefly, probably shocked that he'd finally been bested, and to Techno's rage, Dream's quickly paling face relaxed.

Something inside him *snapped*. Technoblade did not watch his little brother fight for his *life* to see this bastard have a peaceful death.

"Finally," Dream wheezed and his eyes began to cloud but then Techno snatched him by the throat, his eyes glowing red. Techno hoisted Dream in the air and twisted the sword in his stomach causing Dream to scream. He yanked out his sword to spill gore on the bloodied floor and Dream choked and writhed in his hold. His eyes would fade and return to startling green before flickering again over and over, as if something was tethering him to his body.

“Is that what you think, Chaos?” Techno pulled Dream close to hiss into his ear. The Blood God laughed, dark and distorted. **“No. Whereas I am chained to my fiery prison, you remain tethered to yours. They won’t let you die that easily. The wheel turns and your cycle begins anew. You failed.”**

Dream clawed at his throat trying to free himself from the pain as his expression contorted in despair and rage before his eyes glossed over one final time, and Techno dropped him.

From across the room, Tommy stared at Dream’s body. He was dead. Dream’s green eyes bore into his and they were *dead*. Dream is dead. His enemy is dead and Tommy felt no joy from it. He felt no satisfaction or relief, just more pain. It was a strange feeling to have once loved someone that you hate. And he did, truly. He hated Dream and he’d wanted him dead but he had once been his brother. He had loved him and now he was dead and Tommy felt *nothing*.

And then he felt a hand wrap around his own weakly and gasped as he turned back to Wilbur. His emotions crashed back into him. Dream was dead but Wilbur was *dying* and he didn’t know what to do.

“Wilbur, I don’t have my powers anymore. I-I don’t know how to fix this. How do I fix this?” Tommy panicked and tried to stuff more of his cloak against the gash. He didn’t even know if this was helping. The sword went through him and destroyed who knew what. Even if he stopped the bleeding, he couldn’t fix the damage that had been done without his powers.

“You don’t, Tommy,” Wilbur slurred tiredly, his face growing paler by the second. “You let me go.”

“No! *No!*” Tommy shouted angrily and begged him, “They need you. Dad and Techno. Quackity and Charlie. Everyone. *I* need you, please Wil...”

Tommy turned back to Techno and yelled, “Techno! I need help!” But Techno didn’t move, his eyes were glassy as they stared endlessly at Dream. The hand he had wrapped around his bloodied sword twitched over and over and he realized his brother had been pulled far, far into his mind. Tommy was on his own.

A shaky hand came up to futilely brush the tears from his eyes and then tuck a stray piece of hair from his face. “Toms...”

“Don’t you dare fucking leave me, asshole. Don’t you *dare*. Not after everything...” “Tommy..look at me.” His voice is just barely above a whisper.

“You can’t leave me. You promised...” Tommy begged.

“*Theseus*,” Wilbur called to him as loud as he could, which wasn’t much louder than before.

“*What?*” Tommy’s voice broke softly as he clutched onto his brother’s hand.

“You find it. You find your new dream. Promise me,” Wil whispered, his breathing shallow and his hand began to go limp in Tommy’s.

Tommy shook his head mournfully but before Wil could protest he cried, “You fucking idiot. You were my new dream. My family was all I wanted, even when I couldn’t remember.”

Wilbur’s lips shakily pull into a small smile. “You were mine. I just wanted... to see you...s-smile again,” he rasped. His head slowly lolled back and Tommy lost his grip as his brother’s hand slipped from his hold.

With one final inhale Wilbur’s chest fell still.

And Tommy couldn’t accept that. He didn’t know how to. Tommy sobbed as his brother stared past him, eyes glassy...and gone. Tommy shook at him, trying to will his brother back to him.

“Wil...Wilbur,” he called. His hands cradled his head. Tommy shook him harder, trying to pull him up. But he couldn’t, Wilbur was too heavy to carry on his own.

“Wilbur, wake up! Get up, you jackass!” Tommy cried. He didn’t know what to do. He needed help. As he dug his fingers into his brother’s shoulder, still trying to futilely rouse him he pleaded, “Fucking get up! No, no, no. Come back! You don’t get to fucking leave me. Please!”

Tommy choked on his tears and hugged Wilbur as tight as he could. He rocked himself as heaving sobs wracked his body. He cried and screamed and wailed for who knew how long, but no matter how loud he was, Wilbur didn't stir, nor did Techno wake.

When he found his voice was too raw to scream, he began to beg. Tommy begged for Wilbur to wake. For Techno to snap out of it. He begged for his father to fix what Tommy had broken. He begged for his mother's help and comfort. He couldn't lose this. He didn't think he was strong enough to bear it. How could anyone bear this?

Tommy's world collapsed around him as another wave of grief hit him. Wilbur was gone. Techno was lost to himself and Phil had no clue where ' *here* ' even was. Even Dream was gone. Tommy was well and truly *alone*. His worst fear had come true and he was terrified of what that meant.

The memories of exploring the castle halls with Tubbo and his brothers, of sneaking into Quackity's kitchen to steal food, the loving look in his father's eyes all turn sour in his memory as he brokenly realized... he would never feel that way again. Just like he would never feel Crow nestling into his shoulder or his mother's lipstick against his cheek.

This was the end, isn't it? The end of the brief burst of true happiness and love he'd felt in his life. For less than a *month*, Tommy had it all. The hole that was inside him had been filled, only to be savagely torn open again. And it couldn't be fixed. He'd said it himself.

His brother is dead.

His brother is *dead*.

Please. Bring him back. *Bring back what once was mine.*

The sentence looped over and over in his mind, threatening to drive him insane. All the while, he pleaded into the cold stone floor stained with blood for a god that would hear him.

And to his surprise, one did.

Are you sure, little phoenix? Do you understand the price of what you wish for?

This time. It was not the voice of his mother that called, no he'd never heard this one before. But she sounded just as kind. Perhaps she could help him.

"Life for life, right?" Tommy pressed his face back into Wilbur's chest, biting his cheek hard as when a horrible hollow sound was all he heard. It wasn't Wilbur anymore. Wilbur was dead. His brother was gone. "That's how it goes in stories, right? My life for his."

Yes, love. A life for his.

Tommy looked up at Techno, his eyes soulless as he stared at Dream's corpse. His hand still twitched around his bloodied sword.

The Blood God may have his mind now, but it isn't permanent. His entities are far too attached to him. Your brother is still in there.

Techno would be okay. And if it worked? So would Wilbur, and everything would be back to the way it was before Tommy had ever entered their lives.

Surely they could go back to that? Tommy hoped they could. Tommy tried futilely to wipe away his tears and as he looked down at Wilbur, determination surged through him. His eyes fluttered shut as he wished, "Then...I wish for life. Bring him back."

Very well. It shall be done.

Tommy rested his forehead against Wilbur's. "Sorry."

A single tear fell down his face and onto Wilbur's cheek. It sat still for a moment, and then, it disappeared, leaving a small, golden glow.

Tommy's eyes widened when it began to glow that same golden yellow that had followed him all his life. The light swirled down Wilbur's neck, dancing across his collar in ribbons until it reached the ugly wound in his abdomen. The color rushed back to Wilbur's cheeks as the power worked its magic, weaving him whole again yet forever burning the phantom memory of steel into his stomach, promising to haunt him the same way it had done their father.

Tommy felt the magic tickle his cheeks and that's when he realized the magic was his own. He looked down at his hands, at his arms, at his ribs, and his anatomy highlighted in glowing gold.

Glowstick, huh?

His powers had never left him. They'd only gone dormant. And they had never been in his wings at all. They were *him*. His magic was bonded to him so tightly it was impossible to take them from him without destroying him whole. It had been stitched into every atom of his being by patient hands. The light only grew, spreading to nearly every inch of the tower, all the way to the rafters. It played with his hair and wiped away his tears. It pressed kisses across his skin and weaved gently around Techno, comfortingly, hugging him close. A promise to Tommy that he would be safe. Looking further on, he pretended not to see the corner of the room where Dream's body was and how it was notably dark.

The light swirled beneath Wilbur and Tommy and bloomed into a large golden flower that reminded Tommy of some of the flowers he saw in the meadow that day. Tommy tried to hang onto the feeling of the sun on his pale face and flowers weaved into a flower crown in his hair as long as he could. And then as quickly as the flower appeared, it transformed again.

The light bent and shifted until Tommy saw fire and feathers. A large fiery bird emerged and flapped its wings, wide and fierce. He glided over to land in front of the two boys and cawed sadly as he saw Wilbur. The bird neared and for a moment Tommy pulled Wilbur closer out of fear. The bird chirped gently at him trying to placate his already spiked anxiety and eventually Tommy relaxed letting the bird gently nuzzle his face into Wilbur's cheek. A chord of familiarity struck him. "I know you, don't I?" Tommy asked. "From a long time ago."

Tommy squinted. "And you...know him."

The bird hopped onto Wilbur's chest, and Tommy reached out a hand tentatively. The phoenix instantly pressed into the touch and Tommy felt something in his chest break. His hand fell to his chest and he gasped. More light began to shine for somewhere and Tommy looked down to see Wilbur's heart glowing a faint gold in his chest. A sharp pain shot through his chest and the

phoenix raised a wing to brush against Tommy's cheek. It trailed down to his heart which was glowing brightly between his ribs. The phoenix chirped once more and then untangled back into light. The light sewed Wilbur together and slowly Wilbur's heart began to grow brighter while the pain in Tommy's chest grew stronger.

Tommy heard another crack and couldn't help the cry of pain that slipped from his lips. This was it. His heart was breaking. As Tommy weakened, his heart was growing dimmer. He was dying.

"T-Theseus?" Techno's voice cut through his thoughts and Tommy looked up hazily to see his older brother eyeing him in confusion and concern. His eyes were still bright and blood red, but Tommy could see his brother fighting through the haze of the Blood God's thrall. Techno was fighting to get to him and whatever god it was that had him wouldn't let him go.

Another crack echoed throughout the room, this one more a dull ache and slowly Tommy rested his head against Wilbur's chest and assured Techno, who was beginning to stumble toward him. "Everything is gonna be alright, Tech..."

Techno's eyes widened as the meaning hit him, but it was far too late. The light faded and his magic died out. As his heart slowed and his thoughts grew murky, he found himself humming something old and familiar as he drifted off. Slowly his vision faded to white and his voice cut off quietly. The moment Tommy's heart beat for the last time, Wilbur's heart picked up where Tommy's had left off.

His brother's eyes shot open, but Tommy was already gone.

"Shall we look at the moon, my little loon, why do you cry?"

He felt like he was floating again, except this time it wasn't cold. He felt warm and safe, loved even. It was like the sun was resting against him yet something kept it from his eyes but he still felt its warmth soak against his skin. There was a slight breeze and the rustling of melodious chimes through leaves. A soft lullaby lulled in his ears while a hand carded gently through his long hair.

"Make the most of your life, while it is rife, while it is light..."

At first, Theseus believed it was his mother's hands holding him so gently, but when he focused closer on the woman's singing, Theseus froze. His eyes shot open in alarm but before he could panic he heard the woman softly calm him, "*Shh* ...you're safe. You can't be harmed here."

Her hands fell to his cheeks and stroked against his blooming freckles, visible for the first time since he'd been a child. Theseus' hand latched around her wrist but he couldn't bring himself to pull away from the comfort.

"Where am I?" Theseus shifted up and looked at the woman before him. A soft smile met him.

She looked around her mother's age, maybe a bit older. Her hair was a golden blonde, dotted with a few intricate braids before being pulled up into a bun. Her satin ivory dress was long and decorated with intricate golden flowers against the cuff and bodice of the dress, and when she shifted, the sunlight twinkled against the strange embroidery. Her eyes were a strange fractal of colors that hurt his eyes to focus on too long but he was mesmerized by the way they cycled; violet, a stormy blue to a familiar crimson back to blue, and then the fractals returned.

Theseus turned his attention to the sound of windchimes and suddenly the sunlight made sense. The two were sitting on a bench inside a large greenhouse filled with vibrant flowers and buzzing bees. Hummingbirds whisked around in the trees while Theseus spotted a flock of ducks scattered about a large pond. And while it was magnificent,

Theseus felt a swell of hidden pride that he preferred his mother's garden to this strange eden.

The woman let out a strange cough, suspiciously similar to a humored chuckle one might give to a child's mischief. He turned back to the woman. "What happened? Why am I here?"

The humor fled her features and she shakily mustered a bittersweet smile. "You died, my darling."

His unbeating heart dropped like a stone in his chest and he failed to strangle the pained whimper he let out. That's right. He died. He was dead and Wilbur was alive. He had made a choice, simple as that. It didn't make the grief carving a hole in his chest any easier to bear. Another cry bubbled up, this one threatening to overcome him entirely and instantly the woman moved to soothe his fears. "Do not fret, your story isn't over."

“It’s not?” Theseus asked, his voice breaking.

The woman shook her head and gently took Theseus’s hand in hers. And despite her being a complete stranger...it felt natural. “Your brother has slain a great traitor and for that the gods, albeit reluctantly, will grant him a wish. Unfortunately, however, your brother is under the Blood God’s control, so he is not able to make it. And so the voices that haunt him begged for *you* to take it instead. To save yourself.”

Theseus eyed her skeptically, highly doubting that the gods would ever be so kind. Though it felt weirdly nice to know the invaders in his brother’s mind thought so highly of him. Yet something irked him...this felt *too* easy. It couldn’t be that easy. Theseus briefly entertained the idea, cycling through other less suspicious options that would benefit the people he was leaving behind.

Maybe he could wish that they never knew him at all. The little boy in his mind called that particular idea *cruel*. It was strange...he felt more whole in this place, he felt like Theseus. Limbo had felt a similar way but that, he gathered, was mainly caused by the overwhelming flood of memories crashing into his mind and scattering in puzzle pieces that he’d been sorting through since. But here? The foggy memories had cleared a bit, and he was quiet for a long time as he sorted through the moments of his life coming into frame.

Mum’s adoring smile and her purple lipstick on his cheek, his nose, his forehead. Dad’s bear hugs where he’d wrap him not only in his arms but in his wings as well. Tubbo’s hand in his own, clinging for dear life as they sprinted down halls, through passageways and out again till the guards were chasing the little rascals. The smile Technoblade would wear every time he picked up his violin. The same smile eleven years later, smaller and easy to miss, but never missed by Theseus. Wilbur’s hand ruffling his hair and pulling him into side hugs and apologizing because he just couldn’t help himself.

*Theseus was home and he was the happiest man alive. Quackity staring at him in the doorway the first time they’d seen each other and **knew** each other. Quackity slinging an arm gently around his shoulder and filling in the blanks in his memory his family got too overwhelmed to fully talk about. Schlatt and Puffy both hovering just a bit annoyingly (weirdly endearingly) at times, determined not to lose him again. He didn’t mind. He’d always appreciated their company, they were family too. And of course the new people in his life that he loved so dearly already.*

There were so many memories. Good ones, painful ones, broken ones, and ones where Theseus could’ve wept tears of joy seeing. This was the dream he’d wanted so fucking badly. The dream

he'd lost so quickly as he'd gained it. The dream he had the power to wish back to him, a bit broken but still precious.

"And you think I should wish for my life?" Theseus questioned, searching for the trap in this.

"I do not think for you, Theseus. This wish is yours. No loopholes or hidden fine lines, I've made sure of it. I need you to understand that this wish...you can use it to do anything." She suddenly grabbed Theseus' face in her hands and emphasized seriously, "And I mean *anything*. Limitless options. All the power in the world in one wish. *Anything you want.*"

Theseus blinked at her blankly for a moment and then her eyes danced to a color that made his chest tight. *Anything?*

Anything. She promised. She promised and he for some strange reason...Theseus believed her. Whoever this woman was, she wasn't trying to harm him. She genuinely seemed to want to help. Theseus thinks he understands what she means and leans over in her ear to whisper his wish.

She let out a thrilled laugh of joy, beaming at him as though she's known him all his life. She leaned close to gently press a kiss to his temple. It felt like a blanket of protection around his shoulders to keep him safe for a long journey. "Then it's time to go home, my darling."

"What?" Theseus paused, confused. His heart sank in panic. "But that's not what I wished for—"

The woman laughed again at his perplexed expression but it wasn't in malice. She looked at him in soft adoration as she cupped his face again.

"Do you not realize what you are, sweet boy? I created you for your mother. Though I suppose you wouldn't be able to remember that...or me. You are a phoenix, Theseus." Then she smiled wryly. "And the deal was 'A' life, and you, my love, have *several*. A small loophole on my part."

Theseus looked at her dumbly for a moment as he puzzled through her words but then it hit him hard. He *was* going home. His dream wasn't finished yet. He would see his brothers again. Wilbur would get to scream at him for cheating him out of his demise and Techno could berate him for recklessly running off on his own. It didn't matter, he didn't fucking care. He'd grin like an idiot through every word. (A lie. He was happily going to give Wilbur a piece of his mind) Even still,

he'd happily accept their anger...their *fear* as long as it meant he had family back, *permanently* this time.

The amount of joy and relief that washed over him nearly made him topple over. His knees wobbled shakily, and his mouth opened but nothing but dust came out so instead he rushed into her arms until he was able to choke out his gratitude.

The woman immediately pulled him tight into her hold and apologized deeply, "You've suffered so much, and for that, I am *so* sorry. But the worst has passed and Chaos is dead. It is time to begin again. It is time to finally find your happiness...your dream."

A home. A family. His family.

Theseus could've cried if another question wasn't suddenly poking at his mind.

"If I'm a phoenix...If I was always able to do this...were Dream and George even able to kill me?" Theseus asked. "Wouldn't I just come back?"

"With magic as dark as theirs, *anything* can be killed. Even a mighty phoenix." The woman explained tensely. She sighed, "Maybe death is too strong a word...In a way, you would've been alive but you never would've woken again had you slipped away enough. They weren't fools. That's why they kept you weak...to make it even easier."

Oh. If he hadn't pulled himself from death and into his father's arms he would've remained in Limbo...forever. Stuffed so far down that even his mother wouldn't be able to reach him. Lost in the darkness, encased in ice, his voice thrown into silence; it was utterly meaningless to dwell on it, but Theseus couldn't help but shiver knowing it was a terrifying fate he'd narrowly avoided.

"What did Dream mean when he said I have a god? That I'm a vessel?"

The woman gave a remorseful smile. "I prefer to call you my little bird. A vessel...there's no love in a title so hollow. But you are my greatest creation, Theseus. *Tommy.*"

"Who are you?" he asked, the awe in his voice creeping into his tone.

“Most know me as the Goddess of Life, but your mother calls me Sarah,” Sarah replied and then laughed. “I’m still getting used to it, I suppose.”

“What am I?” Theseus then sputtered, “*Sorry*, I have a lot of questions.”

“That’s perfectly alright,” Sarah chuckled and tucked a strand of his hair behind his ear and said, “You are life and *rebirth*... and *love*. But more than that...you are simply whoever you choose to be in this lifetime. You are your mother’s son and you will grow up to be beyond exceptional. I gave you a great gift, but it was never meant to be more than that. *A gift*. If I’d known the fallout of that decision...well it was never my intention for it to cause so much pain.”

Theseus shook his head. “It doesn’t matter anymore. Thank you, Sarah,” he assured her and she beamed at him with nothing but love.

“One last thing, remember, your lives are not infinite. You may be a phoenix, but you are also human, and a life is a fragile thing. There will come a day when your body can no longer be reborn anew. So don’t waste it.”

Theseus tilted his head, confused by her wording.

“Oh, you’ll figure it out,” Sarah laughed and kissed the top of his head. “Goodbye, Tommy.”

And then inhaled sharply, the air whistling down his throat dry and painful from death. He twitched his fingers and coughed in someone’s face. His chest felt like someone had taken a mallet to it. Hands are on his face and a voice pleaded frantically, hysterically, and *far* too loudly in his ear, “Please, please, please. Theseus, look at me. Please, please, *blondie* —”

Someone was *ugly* ugly crying and pulling him upright in their arms and Tommy didn’t appreciate the jostling one bit. He scrunched his features up irritably. For fuck’s sake, he was just resurrected. He needed a minute. Tommy groaned as pried his eyes open and furrowed his brow to say grouchily, “*Ow*.”

He squinted and stared up at Techno, whose eyes were brimming with tears and still bright red. He was staring wide-eyed at him like his own heart had started beating again and not Tommy's. The intense stare was startling and Tommy jolted in surprise.

But at the same time...his expression was off. It wasn't Techno.

Then he looked across from him at Wilbur who was...

Relief crashed into his chest. *Alive. Wil's alive.* He also had snot dripping down his face but Tommy could let it slide just this once. His face clearly no longer wore death's pallor as his eyes and nose and well...*face*...were red with tears. The tear in his clothes that Dream had made was still there but a wobbly smile threatened Tommy's composure as he saw the healed skin beneath.

Wilbur hitched another sob and Tommy met his shining eyes. He looked absolutely wrecked, but Tommy found himself quickly moving past that as his attention was caught by something strange. Tommy's arm shook as he raised it to the extra strands of white in his brother's hair. He frowned. "What's up with that?"

"Speak for yourself! Oh, my fucking gods, Tommy!" Wilbur gasped as he held his face in his hands. His face was splotchy with tears and his chin trembled as he bit back more sobs. The blonde winced in guilt when Wilbur's voice broke awfully. "*Tommy*."

He sounds like he can't believe he's real. His brother leaned down to press a long kiss to his hairline and tucked strands of gold behind his ears.

Tommy leaned into the touch with a sleepy hum. "Sorry, I stole your moment."

"I woke up and you were fucking *dead*! Oh my god, Theseus—" Wilbur cried. Tommy's eyes snapped open again when Wilbur shook him in his hold. "--What part of 'let me go' did you not understand?!"

"Since when do I ever listen—" Tommy tried to joke though already anger ebbed at him.

“Did you think we’d just go back to the way it was?! That you could just die for me and we could just get over you again!? *We never got over you!*” Wilbur yelled, now remembering to be angry. “Don’t you *ever* do something like that again!”

His chest burned and he had to shove down his surprise when his hands flickered like one of Tubbo’s connectors stretched too far, shorting sparks of sunlight like the crackling fire of their campfire the night Dream had given him back his necklace. His face lit up at the familiar sight of the bones in his hand, strange as it sounded. *It’s still here.*

He wondered if he could still heal people, or if his power had been exhausted into a mere party trick. Another feeling struck him, confusion. Was this not the better outcome? They were *alive*. All of them? Why was Wilbur so upset over the best possible outcome?

“And what about you?! You’d be fucking dead right now if I hadn’t!” Tommy yelled back, shoving his hands away. “How the fuck would I live with that!? How would I get over something like that, Wilbur?! You died! You died and you left me and fuck you!”

“I had to. I’m supposed to keep you safe!” Wilbur shouted and then his voice broke quietly as he said, “I promised.”

“I don’t care! I don’t want to fucking hear it!” Tommy spat. He shoved at Wilbur’s chest weakly as he yelled, “I had no one. For years I was stuck with *him*. And then I met you and Tech and...I finally understood that *I’m not the problem*. Because it wasn’t my *fault*. It never was. You and Techno and Phil...you love me. Someone fucking *loves me*. I won’t let you take that from me, Wil. I won’t let *anybody*. ”

And then Wilbur was pulling him into his arms and Tommy clung to him so tight it probably hurt. Tommy burrowed his face into his chest and explained in a small voice, “He was never going to stop till he had me. He lied. All he ever did was lie.”

“He’s dead,” Wilbur promised and one of his hands came up to cradle the back of his head. “It’s done. It’s over. Oh, my gods, I thought I’d have to go through it all over again. I can’t—“

“You *died*, Wil. You were there and then you weren’t and Techno had lost it and I didn’t know what to do except... *beg*. ” Tommy’s voice broke as he trailed off, clutching his shirt and listening to his brother’s heart beat firmly in his chest. It was slower now, but it was still Wilbur’s. “I’m sorry.”

“You scared me to...well y’know...” Wilbur tried to joke but his voice was still thick with tears. Tommy smacked his chest again, *hard*, and Wilbur half-chuckled, half-wincing into his hair.

The two held onto each other tight for another moment before they pulled back and turned to look at Techno, who had seen it all. Now it was both of them who were pained by guilt. From Wilbur saving Tommy, to him bleeding out in his arms, to killing Dream and watching his twin die. Followed by Tommy dying as well. Techno had seen every bit of it while virtually a prisoner in his own body.

Techno’s eyes were shifting wildly through different shades of blood, even looking a terrifying dark brown at one point that made his eyes look entirely *black* before glowing bright red once more. They flitted spastically between Tommy, Wilbur, and Dream’s corpse, which Tommy couldn’t bear to look at.

Tommy was slow, cautious as he grabbed Techno’s hand. His older brother tensed defensively but when he didn’t move more than that, Tommy slowly confiscated the sword he had been clutching onto. Tommy spoke softly as he asked, “Can we have him back please?”

Techno shook his head, burying his face into his hands. “Too much. It was too much for him,” Techno whispered. “He broke.”

“You’re not broken, Tech. You know that.” Wilbur shuffled forward and placed a hand on the back of his neck before pressing his forehead to his, pulling him upright. It had been many years since he’d had to pull his twin out of his head but he had never failed before and he certainly didn’t plan to start now. “I know. I know it was a lot. but you saved both of us. You killed that fucking green bitch. It’s finally over, Tech. You deserve to see that we’re okay.”

“He thinks both of you are dead.”

“All the more reason to let him go,” Tommy squeezed his hand and then he wrapped his arms around his waist and let his head rest against his chest. “Please. You gave me his wish. He needs to see it come true. Let him go. I know you want to see as well, but I need my brother back first.”

There was a long stretch of silence, so long that Wilbur and Tommy began to eye each other nervously. *Was it too late? No, she had promised...* And then Tommy felt a hand shakily brush over

the back of his head, causing him to gasp. Tommy scrambled for his hand and pressed it firmly to his chest just like he'd done the first time in the Infirmary.

"I'm sorry—" Tommy could almost feel his stomach flip on the words with how quickly he flung them out. The terrifying freaky blood eyes were gone, leaving only familiar red in its wake. They sparkled and Tommy could see water brimming along Techno's lower lashes. His hold tightened against the buckles of Techno's bracer and he sputtered, "I—"

"Shut. Up," Techno choked as he cut him off and jarringly pulled him upright. Tommy didn't mind the roughness as he flung his arms around his neck and his brother crushed him to his chest. There was a brief flicker of fear for his back, but when he found no pain Tommy held onto him until it probably hurt. Techno pressed his forehead against his temple and let out a choked cry of pure *relief*.

And then he turned to Wilbur who he could've sworn he saw bleed out not even thirty minutes ago. Wilbur's eyes shone as well and Techno dropped his head down against his twin's shoulder with a silent sob. He pulled him as close as he could with Tommy still safely tucked against his chest. Wilbur leaned his head against his twins and quietly apologized for dying this time without him.

"I could kill both of you if I wasn't so relieved to see your reckless, idiotic faces alive. So let's just make this easy," Techno shook his head, his expression filled with anger and *hurt*. He growled as Tommy had predicted. *"Never again. You two hear me?"*

He pointed to Wilbur, poking his twin harshly in the shoulder. "You at least had a decent excuse. Q's fine by the way, both of them are."

Wilbur shuddered in relief, inhaling deeply as if something heavy and painful had been lifted off his heart. Then Techno turned to Tommy and the boy paled, figuring he would *not* be getting off so easy. And Tommy shrunk into himself causing his brother to pause and narrow his eyes like he was wrestling with himself.

Techno huffed lowly, the anger deflating quickly and the man growled, "Fuck. I'll be pissed later. Just— *Never again*. If you dare leave me alone with Dad like before, I will drag you both out of hell myself. Got it?"

"Loud and clear, big guy," Wilbur agreed, not ballsy or stupid enough to challenge his twin on this.

Tommy made a mental note to *never* ask what his father had been like in the first few years after his disappearance. He'll happily remain oblivious to that knowledge.

"Wouldn't dream of it." Tommy jolted slightly at the double meaning and pulled away to look where Dream was surrounded by glass and a thick pool of his own blood. Dead eyes stared back at him, baring neither love nor hatred, just death. It's only when Techno pushed his face back into his chest and cupped the back of his head that he realized he'd been shaking.

"I'm sorry you had to see that. I know I promised I'd kill him but I never wanted you to have to watch." Techno apologized and his head dropped in shame as he admitted, "I never wanted you to see me like that."

"He's really dead." Tommy breathed. "It's over."

Techno simply nods into his hair and for a while, the three just clung to one another, knowing that for the first time, they wouldn't have to worry when they inevitably had to let go.

Strangely it's Techno that ultimately breaks the silence. "Your hair..." and ran his fingers through a few strands. His expression was complicated to say the least.

"That's just *rude*," Tommy said without any real heat. "What about it?"

"Can you look in a mirror?" Wilbur asked and Tommy swallowed. Dream was dead. There was nothing to be afraid of anymore. Besides, he was with his brothers. Wordlessly, Tommy nodded and Wilbur stood and quickly found himself back on his knees as he clutched his abdomen.

"Wil?!" Tommy cried but Wilbur was quick to wave him off.

"Fine! I'm fuckin— *gah*- fine! *Sore*. " Wilbur rose to his feet once more and this time his hand shot to his lower back. The man groaned. "It's like it's still there. It's not painful, just *very* uncomfortable. Oh, I *hate* that."

Tommy quickly pushed that thought away, “Well it isn’t. You’re one hundred percent not skewered, now *mirror, please.*”

“Alright, alright. I’m living and breathing. Fuckin’ bossy. Sheesh—” Wilbur grumbled and grabbed a washcloth from the kitchen before notably limping to pick up a large fragment of the shattered mirror. Tommy shivered at the way Wilbur paused to stare at Dream.

Techno squeezed his shoulder before getting up as well. He grabbed the dark curtains that Dream had drawn to darken the tower and yanked them down from the bar. Without a word, he covered up Dream's body, not out of respect of course. It was so Tommy no longer had to look at it. It was so Tommy never had to look at Dream ever again.

“Y'know, I could’ve just told you where one was.” Tommy snorted and Wilbur mimicked his tone mockingly and then handed the boy the poor excuse more a hand mirror.

Tommy’s eyes widened.

Right where that damnable strand of hair fell in front of his eyes were the same strands of pure white that his brothers bore from their respective deaths.

We match now.

Techno frowned at the implication and Tommy winced when he realized he’d said that aloud. After a moment though, Techno huffed humorously, “We could’ve just dyed it if you felt left out, you didn’t need to go get all dramatic about it.”

Tommy snorted a laugh though he still found himself staring at himself, perplexity etched in the arch of his eyebrows. He brushed his fingers through the new white and half-mumbled out, “Goddess-forbid, I let you fuckers look cooler than me.”

Then his eyes caught the shapes of Techno’s hands in his mirror and he paused. “What are these?” He traced the strange patterns on his brother’s arm carefully. “What...what’s it gonna do to you?”

Techno stared at his arm and his brow furrowed but he tried to keep the worry out of his expression. He shrugged and admitted, “I...I don’t know. Hopefully, we won’t find out for a long long time.”

“ *You didn’t.* ” Wilbur gasped, horrified. “Fucking hell, Techno! You said yes?! What the fuck is wrong with—”

“I didn’t exactly have a choice, that bastard was never planning on fighting fair,” Techno snapped back and Tommy shifted to lean into his brother’s chest. Techno rested his chin atop his head.

Wilbur looked anxious as he asked carefully, “...What did he want in return?”

Once again the silence stretched so long that Tommy began to shift nervously. And then Techno sighed and admitted, “...I don’t know.”

The three went quiet with distant worry for the future at least until Wilbur moved to squeeze his twin’s hand in his own. Wilbur crossed his legs underneath him and then after a long moment, he sighed, “One day at a time then.”

The looming dread of a debt hung heavy over the three but ultimately they had to push it away for another day. One day at a time.

Techno nodded. “Right then...”

The three began to pull themselves together, rising from the bloodied ground, feeling around for any missed injury or concern. Tommy dreaded the thought of climbing down that ladder, but thankfully he didn’t have to as Wilbur kicked away a fallen curtain from the floor and knelt on the ground to feel around the stone. His fingers hooked into a groove and Tommy’s gaped as Wilbur opened a hidden trapdoor bearing a winding staircase down to the ground.

“Are you *kidding me*?! That was there the whole fucking time?!” Tommy screeched and the twins laughed at his scowling. Tommy grumbled and Techno ruffled his hair.

“Tommy, what did you mean by me having a wish to see?” Techno asked suddenly.

His heart stuttered in his chest as a blinding smile spread across his face. Excitement. Impatience. Tommy grabbed at his brothers and was practically dragging them along, no longer concerned about gathering what few keepsakes he might like from the tower. As far as Tommy was concerned, it could all crumble to the ground. The desperation to get home was suddenly unbearable.

“We need to get home,” Tommy gasped. “There’s something you have to see.”

The twins simply blinked in confusion but they didn’t argue, seeing the determination and eagerness in his eyes.

Chapter End Notes

was it mean to tag MCD in the beginning? yes. do I regret it? no lol

YALL WE HAVE ONE CHAPTER LEFT AND THATS ITTTT WERE CRUISIN TO THE
END LADSSS

ok see yall hopefully in a week (or two im so sorry the jayvik brainrot got me and i got
SIDETRACKED) :3

If you liked this chapter, consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also, you can
send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

If you like art for TGP consider following me on Instagram anyway! @_emiartse

I’m also on Twitter, Tumblr, Tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

Rebirth

Chapter Notes

oh my fucking god we actually made it.
nearly 3 years and we finally crossed the finish line.
I'll save my sappy tears for the epilogue but for now please enjoy the last chapter of The Golden Phoenix (the epilogue will come out on Monday) and thank you all so much for sticking through to the end with me.

Lets give one final round of applause and love to my wonderful beta reader @arbitersart and a shout-out to my dear @theiatime. Seriously, TGP would've never been finished if it weren't for the both of you<33

TW: None. (unless you count tooth-rotting fluff)

Word Count: 11k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Do not take this for granted.” The gods roared. “You are abandoned. ”

“But loved.” Sarah smiled proudly.

“Loved,” the mortal gasped. “Yes. Yes, so loved.”

When she at last opened her eyes she found herself among the flowers she’d once struggled so hard to grow. Flowers she’d defied her very nature to grow. And yet...the Abyss has no life. So she deemed it to be an anomaly—a mistake. One easily rectified. Her fingers gently pressed against the petal of a violet, and for the first time in her ancient life, the flower didn’t wilt. Her eyes widened and she found herself trying to shake the strange cloudiness from her mind.

Kristin wakes up and she is *home*.

“What is this?” she mumbled in disbelief, her voice creaky and raw from disuse. Kristin slowly sat up, wincing at the unfamiliar feeling of soreness. Her hand came up to wipe the sleep from her eyes.

She was in her garden. She wasn't lost in her exile. The Abyss. The empty nothingness. No...she was home. Someone had sent her home. But why?

And then she briefly caught the flap of a familiar green and white hat peeking out overtop the tall grass. She restrained herself from bolting upright and instead peeked over the grass until she saw him. 'Til she saw his sad eyes and his beautiful heart, and then she really didn't care anymore how she'd ended up here. She was just incredulous that she had. His name spilled from her lips as she gasped inaudibly, "*Phil*."

Her Angel. Her husband and the love of her exceedingly long life. Her best friend and her first friend. *Philza* was pacing back and forth, his wings ready to take flight at any moment. Her heart leaped in her throat suddenly terrified he'd fly off before he could see her. He seemed anxious, frightened even. What had she missed while she was out? What would he say when he noticed her? What would she say?

She'd never expected to see her love again. She had fully resigned herself to her fate, satisfied in knowing Tommy was home and her family was together. His face was the last thing she had seen before the gods banished her.

And now here she was with a chance she was not foolish enough to miss. She decided to stop wasting time. She stood on bare feet and brushed the still-alive grass from her dress, a beautiful off-shoulder ivory gown that felt light as a feather. The sleeves were long, loose, and elegant, but she had to admit it was a far cry from her normal attire. Her wavy brown hair fell loosely to her waist and atop her head, a simple crown of purple roses.

She was slowly starting to piece together whose work this was. She looked back to Phil, who still hadn't noticed her. He wondered if he would be angry at her for leaving. Kristin took a deep breath, there really was only one way to find out.

"*Angel?* " she called, loud enough that she knew he heard her. He always heard *her*. Phil froze, his eyes blown wide. She heard him let out a shuttered gasp and his entire form began to shake.

Phil turned his head slightly, *sharply*, refusing to look but acknowledging her presence regardless. His anger was something he'd never *ever* heard directed at her. His words were seething with gritted teeth, "If you're some kind of trick...some *hallucination* to torment me further then *go*. I have had enough grief."

Her heart ached for all the pain she'd put him through.

She took another step forward and clasped her hands in front of her. She fiddled with her ring finger, mourning the loss of her wedding band. She swallowed. "I...I suppose I have no way to prove that I'm not. To be honest, I'm terrified myself that this isn't real."

"Gods... *why* must you sound so much like her...?" Phil agonized, he tilted his head to the sky and cursed, "You are cruel."

"Phil," Kristin said his name with all the love, devotion, and sorrow she hadn't been able to express for years. She took another step towards him and Phil squeezed his eyes shut and cringed away but his body began to shift to face her, unable to pull himself away from her presence, fake as he believed it to be. Because a hallucination was better than nothing at all, right?

She didn't touch him. She had a feeling that might not go over well...yet. But she was close enough to smell the Earth, the trees, and the sky. All those things they'd left behind in their 'youth'. Kristin tried her best to coax him, "Look at me."

Look at me, my darling. I am home. I am yours.

"You're not real. You can't be her. You're another trick," Phil spat, though his posture made him seem terrified... as if this encounter had gone on far longer than he'd expected it to. "Haven't you done enough?"

"I never meant to leave you like that, I'm so *sorry*," Kristin's eyes watered and her voice broke at the words. Her husband flinched at the sound and the anger on his face melted away into sorrow. Kristin pressed further. "I just...I couldn't let you die—I couldn't..."

Phil dug his hands into his hair, knocking off his hat without batting an eye at the inconvenience. Kristin wanted so badly to just hold him and promise him they'd never be apart again. The man let out a wounded noise while his hands covered his eyes. He shook his head endlessly, refusing to believe. Refusing to let himself be *that naive*. She could hardly blame him for his disbelief.

After all, they had broken every rule in the book to keep their children alive and the gods rewarded them for it?

“Please, *please* don’t. Not if you’re not really her.” Phil begged, drifting automatically closer even without opening his eyes. Kristin’s heart broke as she looked up to the man she loved, whom she worshipped as much as he did her. Her other half. Her silly bird. *Her Angel*. Her husband shook. “I can’t bear it.”

She was just as in love with him as she had been the day she’d left. He was real. This was real.

“It’s me, Phil. It’s Kristin. You gave me that name. Long, long, ago, my love.” With trembling hands, she gently tilted his head up and cupped his face in her hands. She felt a sob build up and spill over as she brushed away his tears. She brushed their foreheads together as she breathed, “This is real. It’s over, Angel.”

She pulled back and slowly, after a minute of gentle coaxing, Phil finally opened his eyes. The moment his eyes met hers, he broke. Phil dropped to his knees, eyes wide in disbelief as he stared up at her. Kristin nearly wept at the sight of the blue she feared would never look at her again. His hand came up to clutch at the hem of her skirt and he sat back on his knees as he stared at her.

“Am I dead? Did I crash in the...?” Phil asked, genuinely, still refusing to believe this could possibly be real. He was definitely in shock. Kristin shook her head firmly but she could tell that he didn’t believe her. “No, I must be..how—*how* are you here?”

How are we here? How was this a world where the gods decided they deserved to be together after all? It was no wonder that Phil would believe himself to be dead.

“I don’t know, but Angel...does it truly matter?” Kristin asked, brushing her thumb across his cheek. She smiled at him with tears in her eyes.

She had missed him *so much*. They had been together for millennia and just a decade apart had torn the two to pieces. But now he was here. Her love was here in front of her, trembling with hope, and at that moment Phil sucked in a breath and finally saw through whatever had made him doubt.

“No.” And then Phil surged up to his feet and pulled her into a deep kiss that attempted to make up for the long agonizing years he spent without her. Kristin met his desperation just as easily, pulling him as close as she could.

The kiss was brief, simply the first of many. Proof that this was real. Evidence that this wasn't some cruel joke after all and the hands that were holding her so tightly were her love's after all.

Phil reluctantly had to pull away when sobs wracked his form. Kristin tried to chase the tears away, even though she wasn't much better. So she just held him tight as she could. Phil buried his face into her neck and begged her not to leave him, terrified out of his mind that she'd suddenly vanish. All Kristin could do was promise endlessly that she wouldn't.

She wasn't going anywhere.

And eventually, when Phil's shoulders stopped shaking and he lifted his head to meet her gaze, His hands brushed around the curls that framed her face and Kristin smiled against his palm. His puffy eyes squinted in confusion for a moment as he looked at her. Kristin was just about to ask what the matter was before Phil's eyes widened and more tears fell down his face.

And then finally, he smiled at her for the first time in a decade and Kristin was suddenly the one crying. "Brown."

"What?" Kristin furrowed her brow fondly.

"Kristin...your eyes. They're *brown* ." Phil choked on a sob and Kristin finally understood what he meant.

Her eyes were brown. She no longer wilted flowers with a single touch. She couldn't feel the world around her. She could no longer see the threads of life that hung like a noose around all that she loved. She scrambled for Phil's hand and pressed it against where her heart would be if she wasn't a Goddess who had never needed one to keep her alive. Her sons and her husband had filled that emptiness. They had always been her heart. She had never needed one of her own.

She waited, holding her breath till it hurt for the first time. And then Phil laughed and peppered her face with kisses. Phil pressed her hand to her heart and Kristin froze when she felt it beat newly under her touch.

Mortal. She was mortal. She was free.

Kristin pulled him in for another kiss, this one much slower and passionate. It was no longer desperate in fear it wouldn't last. No. It was slow now because they knew it *would*. She beamed in the knowledge that they had all the time in the world now. Kristin smiled against his lips. "We're alive, my angel. Both of us."

"Then...this is *real*? You...You're really here? I'm not dead—" Phil breathed heavily as he finally pulled apart from her. He looked dazed for a split second until her husband's eyes widened in panic and he jolted further from her hold. "Fuck... *fuck!* The storm— *Wil and*— Fuck! "

"Phil?" Kristin asked. Phil scrambled to his feet, dragging Kristin up with him who clutched at his forearms. "Where are the boys?"

Phil's face fell even further and Kristin realized she'd missed quite a bit. "Phil. Where are our sons?"

"Chaos took Wilbur. They found Quackity in his apartment. He's alive but he hasn't...he's not been able to tell us anything other than that. We think Tommy took off on his own with one of the horses and then Techno went after him," Phil grieved and Kristin felt her heart skip painfully in her chest for the first time. "I've spent *hours* flying around trying to find them but the storm is making it impossible to see anything. I ended up having to turn back otherwise I would've fallen out of the sky. I've been waiting for it to clear up enough but I couldn't bear to wait any longer. I was about to fly off to try again when you called to me."

"I think Chaos is dead." Kristin blurted out and Phil froze. "You know as well as I do that gods aren't charitable. If they bless someone, it's for a reason. And the only reason that can explain how I'm free is if someone killed Chaos and the gods rewarded them."

"I need to find them. The tower Tommy mentioned. I have to find it."

Kristin smiled. "It's a good thing I know exactly where it is."

Phil chased her back, pulling her into him for as long as they could afford. But just like that, they were a team again, and nothing had ever changed. She was quick to mark it on the map Phil had

haphazardly shoved in his satchel. Kristin cupped his cheek when she saw his expression wilt in realization.

*He'd charted this area himself. He blames himself for **missing** him, that he wasn't thorough enough, and that he should've gone through every single map no matter how small or how old. How he could've had his son back years ago if he'd just—*

It's strange. To know someone so long, to be so inextricably bound from the beginning to each other. Kristin wondered at what point in the millennia they'd spent together that she started reading his eyes, seeing everything he didn't say, wouldn't.

She brought up her other hand to cradle his now full beard (which would be staying if she had anything to say about it.) Kristin tilted his chin down and told him firmly, "Don't do that to yourself. Don't you *dare*."

"Sorry—"

Kristin kissed him again, effectively scrambling the poor bird's brain enough to forget while they were blessed with such a precious moment after so many years. It wasn't a long kiss, just something firm and *real and wonderful*. She pulled back to bury her face in his neck.

"Do you want to come with me?" Phil asked. Kristin could tell it pained him to even suggest the thought of separating so *soon*. When it was still raw and terrifying but...Phil continued, "I plan to take a squad with me. I know a path around the mountain down to that land."

Kristin hummed thoughtfully, considering the idea for a moment but ultimately shook her head. "You need to be focused and I would only upset them...Wilbur at least, maybe Tommy. I'd rather see them here. They remember me here at least. I just have to hope it will make things a bit easier..." she trailed off, gnawing on her cheek slightly before asking, "I know it's a lot to ask especially *this* soon but...can you promise me something?"

"Anything," Phil said earnestly, his forehead pressing to hers.

She could've asked him to take on the gods themselves and Phil would've done it without a second thought, even if it almost certainly meant his death or worse. And yet she knew without a doubt

that he would not fail. So that's why she made him promise. "Promise me you'll bring them home, that you'll come home."

Phil wrapped his fingers around the chain on his neck and snapped the latch in one swift motion. He unfurled the chain letting two... *oh*. Kristin's heart felt so full and she hadn't even seen her children yet.

Phil moved slowly and took Kristin's hand in his own. He slid her wedding ring back onto her ring finger, right where it belonged. Right where it would *stay*. Kristin snatched his from his palm and then held out her empty hand expectantly. Phil offered it easily and felt the knot in his throat swell tighter watching her slide his own ring back on. She pressed a kiss to the back of his hand. "Alright, alright! Off with you you silly old bird. Go bring back my babies."

"I promise," Phil swore, stealing one more kiss and earning a disapproving gasp mixed with giddy laughter. She swatted him off, letting him take off as effortlessly as he'd done the day she'd met him so long ago.

Wilbur had to admit. He had not expected to leave that tower alive. He had made his peace the best he could with his impending demise, his *demise*. And yet, he was still here, still breathing, though his hands were on the railing of the tower steps. His abdomen cramped badly, it felt heavy but it wasn't as bad as before. Perhaps walking would be the key to this new development... Wilbur sighed. His own advice repeated in his mind. *One day at a time*.

"God, I wonder if this is how girls feel every month. This sucks."

Techno raised a brow at him. "Are you on the floor crying and bleeding?"

Wilbur furrowed his brow. "No? Not anymore at least and I wasn't *crying*."

Tommy gave him a hard side-eye there but didn't say anything...for now.

“You got stabbed *once*. Don’t be a wuss,” Techno huffed and he saw Tommy suppress the urge to laugh. Wilbur eyed him suspiciously anyway but he couldn’t stay mad long, not today.

“It went *through* me, dude,” Wilbur deadpanned and his twin shrugged as they reached the ground floor. Dream thankfully had not blocked off the entrance again. It had taken the bastard an embarrassingly long time to remove them all. Wilbur would’ve made fun of him if he hadn’t been sure it would cost him his tongue. Wilbur playfully shoved at his twin and earned a harsh yank on the back of his jacket, making him stumble back. And the antics probably would’ve grown from there if *once again* Tommy had not bolted the moment his feet hit fresh grass. Techno immediately ducked out the door after him and Wilbur followed suit only jarring to a halt at the sight outside.

Tommy sprinted across the clearing before launching himself into their—*oh shit*— father’s hold. Phil didn’t so much as stumble, instead catching him easily and pulling him into a bruising hug. Phil laughed heartily with relief and spun him around for good measure. The last time he’d come here, Wilbur had been scared shitless at the thought of facing his father again. Now, he was so overjoyed it was even an option. Phil’s wings curled over the teen’s shoulders and Phil exhaled, “Thank the goddess...”

Tommy jolted at that and then whispered something to him frantically and Phil’s eyes went wide. Tears spilled over his cheeks and then he nodded earnestly into his shoulder. Tommy’s shoulders shook slightly and Phil pressed a kiss to his temple.

Techno grabbed his wrist and quickly began dragging Wilbur along with him, not even entertaining the idea that Wilbur might bail. He wouldn’t, but he couldn’t blame Techno for expecting it. He’d done it one too many times. This time, he had zero desire to run.

Phil’s head shot up, eyes red, and Wilbur was outpacing Techno by the time they reached them. Tommy stepped back a moment, letting Wilbur have his own attempt to knock the man over, only succeeding slightly with a steady step back as Phil hugged his eldest tight.

Techno tried to skirt by with just a side hug and failed miserably when Tommy shoved him further into him, causing both the teen and his father to cackle. Phil hugged them both warmly and Techno easily melted into it, one arm around his back and his other clutching Phil’s shoulder.

“We will be having *words* over this later, Techno,” Phil said sternly into his shoulder and Techno raised his brow as Phil pulled back to frown. “Quackity ratted you out.”

“*Bastard.*” Techno turned to glower at his twin as if he had had anything to do with it. Wilbur looked notably smug about it though. Before he could complain to Wilbur over it, the brunette felt someone squirm into the hug. The three chuckled but easily made room for Tommy, holding him tight. Of course, Techno, ever the enjoyer of his own personal space, pulled away first, citing, “Alright, alright, we’re wasting daylight, cut the cuddly shit.”

Wilbur eyed Tommy humorously and said without thinking, “Like we never even died.”

Before Tommy could laugh, Phil jerked both of them back like he’d been burned and then he had one hand on each of their faces as he examined the two. He looked *gutted* as he stared at Tommy’s hair, only now noticing the pure white since it blended better with his hair than the twins’. He looked to Wil again, gasping at how much more of Wil’s hair had been stripped white. “Gods, Tech you were right. I should’ve gone immediately.”

“It’s done,” Wilbur said, pushing away his hand but not pulling back. “No point feeling sorry about it.”

“Wilbur,” Techno began, pausing a moment before asking, “Did you see—?”

“Mum? No,” Wilbur said harshly and Phil and Tommy eyed each other oddly. “I didn’t see much of anything...but I think I was in a tunnel. I heard a horn and saw...something big and metal and *fast* and then I fucking woke up to Tommy’s dead ass.” He sounded apathetic, but the image of waking up to Tommy’s body slumped over his chest, his face pale with death, and staring with lidded grey eyes at nothing was forever seared into his brain. He shuddered.

The teen smiled, not looking a smidge guilty while Phil looked closer to *ill*. Tommy placed his pointer finger under his chin and his thumb at his cheek and said snarkily, “Turns out, I’m simply too epic to stay dead for long.”

Phil still appeared stricken but tried to recover as best he could. “L-Let’s get out of here before you three give me a heart attack.” His eyes landed on Techno’s right arm and he froze. He eyed his son. “Do I even want to know?”

Techno winced. “Not at the moment.”

Phil swallowed thickly and then sighed, “Gods above, let's go. Puffy will meet us at the top of the mountain. You two can use the elytra and I'll pull you up in turns then I'll carry Tommy.”

His father turned his gaze up to the tower and then to Techno. His expression darkened. “I assume *he* is no longer walking among us, correct?”

Techno barked a bitter laugh and then clamped his hands warmly over Tommy's ears as he said, “Do you seriously believe I left him up there alive?”

“Just checking,” Phil said, almost disappointed. Wilbur noted the way Tommy didn't question it as they began the hasty journey home. And while Wilbur of course was anxious to get back to Quackity, he noticed that Phil and Tommy seemed equally as anxious to get back as well. Techno caught his eye and his twin simply shrugged at him, confirming that he too had noticed the shift in demeanor.

Regardless, they continued and Tommy never looked back at the tower.

Wilbur found it was a much swifter journey when your father could fly and had a squadron of horses ready to return them to the castle without delay. Wilbur also found that he didn't mind in the slightest. He had no desire to take the scenic route this time, not when he was so antsy to get home. Ossium greeted him warmly as he shucked off his brother's elytra, handing it to Techno who had gone up first. The horse bumped his head almost irritably into his chest, nipping at his coat and Wilbur brushed his snout. “Hey Os, sorry I left you hanging, I swear I've got a pretty good excuse.”

Techno chucked a branch at him, missing on purpose, while Phil nose-dived off the cliff, giant wings outstretched gracefully as he swooped down to retrieve Tommy who had nervously asked to go last. Suddenly, Wilbur felt someone grab the back of his coat, yanking him harshly causing Wilbur to yelp and stumble backward. When he reluctantly turned he came face-to-face with an *extremely* pissed-off Tubbo. A few feet behind him, Ranboo stood looking just as upset though notably less murderous. Tubbo grabbed his collar, compass in hand, and demanded in a surprisingly terrifying tone, enunciating each word darkly, “*Where is he?*”

Wilbur decided he did *not* want to be the one to get shot today (he'd died enough times thank you very much) so he quickly pointed over the cliff. “W-Wait, wait, just give it a moment...”

Thankfully, as if on cue his father shot over the cliffside into the sky and high into the sky. Wilbur had to hold back a laugh when he saw that Tommy had his face buried into Phil's shoulder and his arms wrapped around his neck practically strangling the poor man. Phil held onto him tightly as he expertly curved himself down, making a slow swirling descent to the ground so they didn't smack into a tree. He released Tommy a foot or two from the ground and landed a few feet ahead. Tommy didn't even have a chance to recover from the terrifying flight before Tubbo pounced on him.

"*waGH—Shit!*" Tommy cried. "The fuck-?!" The teen struggled to try and push the older boy off but Tubbo wasn't budging till he made his point. He grabbed Tommy by his collar and yanked him upward.

"You, *motherfucker*. *This*," Tubbo seethed, and Tommy cringed away as the brunette shoved his compass into his face and then into his chest as the ramling's anger gave way even more. "This here?! This stays on, you fucking dick! It's not for Charlie or Quackity, or anyone else. It's yours! It belongs to you! So that you don't get lost *again!* *So I can't fucking lose you again!*" Tubbo screamed, his voice breaking midway through as he spotted the white in Tommy's hair. Tommy's eyes widened and suddenly he looked like he felt *awful*. Before Tubbo could begin to yell again he was interrupted by Tommy engulfing him into a hug.

"I'm sorry. I was stupid. I was a fucking *moron*. M'sorry, Tubbo." The blonde sounded tiny as he apologized into his shoulder, "I just...I thought I could keep people from getting hurt if I just gave him what he wanted...but I was wrong. I shouldn't have gone on my own."

Tubbo froze, he hadn't expected Tommy to relent so easily. He pulled back slightly to stare up at him for a moment and then his hands slowly dug into the back of Tommy's cloak as he melted into the hug. Tubbo sniffled, "I'm not trying to like...control you or make you feel trapped I just—"

"Dude—" Tommy shook his head. "*Shut up*. I know it's not like that. I just didn't want to risk Dream getting anywhere near you two."

Ranboo's nose twitched and their expression was a puzzle. Tommy held out a hand and the enderling joined quietly. Tommy squeezed their shoulder. "Alright, bossman?"

"You...died," Ranboo whispered, staring uncharacteristically at the white of Tommy's hair. Their hand came up apprehensively and Tommy merely leaned forward so they could twirl a strand of it around their finger, examining it like it was a parasite. Something that shouldn't be there.

“And yet...” Tommy assured them, “Here I am. Alive and well and ready to cause more problems. Forever. You two are stuck with me.”

And to his surprise, Wilbur watched as Ranboo simply smiled with a tearful nod and pulled the two close again, making Tommy promise them both that there would be no more impromptu trips. He more than eagerly agreed.

The three only separated when they had to mount onto their horses. Techno whistled, grabbing Tommy’s attention as he mounted onto Carl, who was eyeing him rather crossly. Tommy made a mental note to find out where the golden carrots were kept. Techno reached down a hand to him and effortlessly pulled the teen up to sit in front of him so he could guide Carl.

Wilbur gently scratched his fingers along the back of Ossium’s ear earning a grateful whine in return. The prince grinned and encouraged the bony steed, “Alright. Let’s go home, huh?”

The sun was just in the earliest stages of dusk by the time they reached the castle. Tommy had led Carl for a grand total of ten minutes before leaning back against Techno, exhausted suddenly. Techno was just about to tease him for being lazy when he noticed the boy had already fallen asleep, his mouth opened dumbly, letting out soft snores.

His twin had simply huffed, shifting so Tommy couldn’t slump over too much. Wilbur just said it would make sense for the kid to be worn out. If the simple act of healing himself had tired Theseus out so much back when they’d brought him to the castle the first time, then Wilbur could only imagine what reviving an entire person did to him. It was unanimously decided to let the kid sleep, he’d more than earned it. Their father flew overhead, leading the caravan back.

By the time they’d pulled into the stables, Tommy had a rather impressive trail of drool sliding down the corner of his mouth. Techno gently hoisted Tommy in his arms as he dismounted Carl. He set the sleeping boy on his feet, letting him stir back to consciousness with the threat of imminent gravity. Techno had expected Tommy to wake up and eye him spitefully for rousing him, grouchily telling him to “fuck off and let him sleep”. Instead, he woke in a near panic, jolting himself upright and spinning around to clutch Techno’s arms, his blue eyes were wild and filled with more life than Wilbur had ever seen. *Bad idea. Noted.* Wilbur rushed over from the opposing stall. “Woah! Easy, kid. Hey, kid, hey—”

The teen stumbled a bit before shaking his head disorientedly. He slurred tiredly, “Where? Where is —?”

“You have something to show us, right?” Techno reminded him.

Wilbur looked outside the barn doors, past the stables to where if he rounded a corner or two he’d be back. He really needed to find a subtle way to run off, which sounded *terrible*. But for once, he wasn’t running away from anything. He was...chasing his *own* dream, as corny as it sounded. So as much as he wanted to be with his family after something so horrific, he needed to get to the kitchen. He couldn’t go by word of mouth anymore, he had to see for himself that they were *both* okay.

Tommy nodded and took a long moment to rub his eyes. He groaned into his hands. “Ugh, why am I so tired—?”

“You died today, kid. I’d think that’d wear most people out. I slept for almost a week when it happened to me,” Techno said like it was *normal*.

Phil appeared from the corner, eyeing them expectantly. “Everyone alright? Ranboo and Tubbo said they’d be around again later.”

Techno placed a hand on the back of Tommy’s forehead and gave a small soft smile. One of the rare ones that Wilbur only saw when he wasn’t being an ass, which wasn’t often. “You’ve had a busy day, Theseus.”

“Mm...No shit,” Tommy coughed and then steadied himself on the ground. He turned and there was a flicker of *something* in the stormy blues of his iris. “Day isn’t over yet. Come with me.”

Wilbur froze when Tommy tried to grab his hand. The man pulled away, suddenly feeling extremely guilty. He wasn’t one to stammer, but he did in this particular moment. “Tommy, I—I have to...” He eyed the hallway leading to the kitchen and was practically inching his way over without realizing it. “Quackity...he—.”

Tommy’s face fell immediately, like he’d just kicked a puppy in front of him. And if Wilbur wasn’t dead set on getting back to Q he’d take it back, but Quackity came first in this. Wilbur looked to his father helplessly because if anyone understood his panic, surely it would be him? If he had the chance. He mentally braced himself to argue with his little brother when Phil cut him off, “Let him go, Tommy. I think this might be better actually.”

Now *what does THAT mean?* Wilbur eyed his father quizzically and asked, “Wait, what exactly is this—?”

“It’s a surprise! You’re supposed to come find out.” Tommy shushed him strangely, but the sleepy excitement in his eyes was unmistakable. *Well, shit.* He was ready to disappoint him when Tommy continued, concealing something in his tone. “Alright, alright...meet us after, okay? And tell Charlie I did not die please, I’m sure that’s stressing him out.”

Wilbur could’ve hacked up a lung at that but he nodded, squeezing his arm and rushing goodbyes to his twin and father before quickly sprinting off, only stopping when Techno called, “Wait, Wil!”

“If you’re going to taunt me you can go fuck yourself!” Wil yelled halfway out the door when he heard the sound of his native tongue polluting the peace of *his* home.

He skidded to a halt and whipped around to glare daggers at his twin. (Techno *knew* he hated that) The man simply raised an eyebrow daringly and repeated himself, “*Don’t fuck it up again. It’s getting borderline painful.*”

He debated throwing something at him, it seemed all vulnerability and fear from nearly losing each other and Tommy was long gone and replaced by the same snarky bastard he saw everyday. And yet...against his better judgment and every fiber in his body, he began flipping through some of his most despised memories for the sake of appeasing his brother. Because yeah, he did *kinda* feel bad about dying in front of him. And though the sound physically made him feel ill, he still muttered out in a *very* rusty accent, “*I don’t plan to.*”

There was a flicker of smug satisfaction in Wilbur’s gut at the utter shock on Techno’s face and with that, he strode out the door.

Phil and Tommy just side-eye each other, though admittedly Phil looked a tad stunned, startled even. Phil turned to Techno after a moment and asked, “And what was that...?”

“I was trying to be sincere and a dick at the same time,” Techno said nonchalantly and the three continued with Tommy’s stomach in knots.

Still, he laughed, “And did you succeed?”

Tommy didn’t think he’d ever seen Technoblade look so smug and...something else Tommy couldn’t place but as he shoved his hands in his pockets he beamed with his small tusks and fangs on display. “*Yes.*”

His smile was short-lived, however, when Techno winced, a sharp pain behind his eyes that came with the never-ending chatter in his brother’s mind. Techno pinched his brow and then asked, “Theseus? Is there a particular reason as to why my Chat is currently losing it in my head?”

His blue eyes widened and he was more alive than ever as he shot upright like a man on a mission, the sleepiness from before now nowhere to be found. He grabbed Techno’s hand and began practically dragging him along. Tommy turned to his father. “Where?”

Phil grinned and his eyes sparkled with a joy Techno had not seen in years. His father strolled ahead. “Gardens. Come on, this way. I forgot to mention it to Wil but I’ll let a guard know.”

Tommy would’ve sprinted if he hadn’t been ninety percent sure he would’ve gotten lost. Meanwhile, Techno seemed more confused than anything, but he let himself be dragged off nonetheless.

“Theseus, you’re going to rip my sleeve.”

“Then start moving your fucking legs!”

His brother chuckled, continuing with his torturously sluggish pace. Techno was unaware that behind him, Phil was grinning ear to ear and his eyes were shining just enough for Tommy to spot in the light. They reached the gate leading to the outdoor gardens and paused at the door a moment, feeling all the confidence leave him at once. Tommy felt his hands start to shake.

“What?” Techno asked and then shook his head in amusement as he grabbed the handle to the gate. “Don’t fall asleep again on me please, my arm is still numb.”

Tommy could tell what look on his face was starting to make Techno just as nervous as Chat. He exhaled, feeling his mended heart race in his chest. And Tommy would’ve probably replied with... well, *anything*, had he not known what was on the other side of that gate. He felt his chest swell with emotion as he swallowed and asked in an unnaturally quiet voice, “Can uh...Can you open it?”

“If you want? I just don’t get why you both are acting so—“ Techno chuckled and swung open the gate while giving Tommy an amused shake of his head.

And then he looked out into the guards and the laughter died in his brother's throat. The world went silent.

Tommy held his breath and peeked out behind his brother to see...

Tommy wrenched out a quiet sob as he looked back— not to Crow. Not to the Goddess of Death or the Empress. He looked at his mother, with her long brown curly hair and flowers in her hair. She was staring back and she looked so fucking *proud* of both of them.

Techno tripped on his feet despite standing still and Tommy’s hand shot to steady him. He went rigid as he stared ahead with bright red eyes wide in complete and utter shock. Tommy slowly let his hands fall to his sides so Techno didn’t have to rip them away when he ran without thought to the woman standing with open arms for Techno to collapse into.

Techno was easily a head taller than her now but Kristin didn’t seem to care much as she clutched him as tightly to her as he could and rocked him in her hold. “Oh, my brave boy,” She wept and laughed all at once. “*Hello, Techno.*”

He pulled back to let her hold his face carefully in her hands, to see him. To see how he’d grown in the years they’d lost with fresh eyes. His hands gently came up to hold her wrists and Kristin beamed tearfully and ran her thumb soothingly over his cheek and then the other. Techno easily abandoned any pride if there was ever any over this and his head simply dropped against his mother’s shoulder to cry out like the wounded child he’d been the night they’d lost her, “*Mama...*”

Kristin leaned her head against his and raised a hand to his long hair, brushing through it with her fingers for the first time in years. She held the back of his head to her shoulder and then her gaze turned to Tommy.

He let out another choked noise and felt a hand on his shoulder. His father's words were what unglued his feet from the ground, "I think...your mother wants to see you, Theseus."

Phil sounded just short of giddy, the joy in his voice made his father sound just as he had years ago. Before Dream had destroyed everything. Tommy stumbled forward when his brother turned to stretch out his hand towards him. He smiled with tears falling freely down his face. "Thank you."

Tommy *sprinted* and crashed into his brother and mother's arms with a speed that shocked even him. Techno pulled away enough to let Tommy curl into Kristin's free arm. She let go of Techno briefly only so she could hold Theseus' face in her hands and press endless kisses against his forehead, cheeks, and nose with another teary laugh, one that Tommy easily mirrored before burying further into her arms. She pulled her sons as close as she could, not caring in the slightest that they were much harder to hold together than they'd once been.

"C-Crow—*Mum*," Tommy gasped into her shoulder. His eyes watered and he squeezed them shut tightly, letting a few fall as well. She craned her head slightly to press another kiss to his cheek.

"My baby. Oh, my babies. *Look at you*," she chimed, her voice light as air. She thumbed over both of their cheeks again and said, "Oh, how I missed you. I missed both of you more than you can ever know. I'm so sor—"

Techno shook his head and cut in, "There's nothing to forgive, not for me." He looked to Tommy who nodded in agreement. Then the two frowned slightly before Techno said, "Wilbur understands. He won't admit it, but he does."

"Wilbur has the right to be angry at me. I am not entirely blameless in all of this. There were things I should've told you, should've told your father. I thought I could stop it long before it came to that point," Kristin explained but frankly Tommy didn't care and neither did Techno. It didn't matter anymore.

"Sarah was really nice," Tommy mumbled and Kristin froze and slowly pulled the two back to frantically scan over them. Tommy could see the moment her heart sank in realization. "She kinda...helped me out with the wish. I hope you don't mind being just like us now."

“Oh, my sweet Theseus.” She pressed their foreheads together and said, “It’s all I’ve ever wanted. But you weren’t supposed to die to achieve that.”

Tommy didn’t regret dying for Wilbur or giving up his wish for his mother but he didn’t have an excuse for it either, so instead he decided ignorance was bliss for now. He merely shrugged and let her press another kiss to his forehead with a frown.

He felt Techno’s hand on his shoulder and paled a bit because if Tommy recalled correctly, Techno had tabled *that* particular discussion earlier. Which meant he most likely wanted to talk to him one-on-one about it. *Well, look at that, the consequences of my own stupid actions.* And he still would do it again every time.

Every time.

Phil walked over to entwine his fingers into Kristin’s and pressed a kiss to her forehead, whispering something too low for Tommy to hear, but not for Techno, whose ears twitched slightly and the corner of his mouth went wobbly.

“I’d do it again,” Tommy whispered to Techno who wrapped an arm around his shoulders and pulled him lightly to his side.

“I know.” Techno turned his head slightly and huffed, “I can’t pretend that I wouldn’t have done the same.”

You did. You did the exact same thing.

“You killed Dream.” Tommy didn’t know why it had taken so long for that fact to hit him again.

“Do you hate me for it?” he asked.

“No.” Tommy shook his head and leaned into Techno’s side. “I’ve spent too many years hating the people I love to ever do that again.”

It took a moment for the sentence to register but when it did Techno’s eyes watered without his permission. He pulled Tommy into a hug, a real hug. A hug that threatened to break Tommy entirely if it hadn’t been Techno holding him. “I love you too, kid. But you knew that, eh?”

He heard a stifled coo and looked to see his mother and father eyeing them fondly and instantly both boys scowled at them causing Phil and Kristin to burst into laughter, more real than he’d ever heard.

And despite themselves, Techno and Tommy easily joined in, a family once more (not quite whole yet, but close).

And by the way Kristin occasionally eyed the door, Tommy could tell she was thinking the same. The doorknob rattled and opened with a small figure sprinting out with terrifying speed and then something tackled Tommy to the ground *again*.

And then Kristin gasped.

Wilbur ditched the hallway, running back out and around to the gate he’d opened so many times, always to see the same person. His best friend. The love of his life and many other terms of endearment some of which he hoped to add on in the future. *Future. What a beautiful word.* As he ran he startled a few guards, apologizing as he rushed by them, uncaring of how they stared. His hands clanged hard against the iron bars as he pushed the gate open but he hardly felt it as he ran even though his lungs begged for a break. He practically skidded past the dumpsters, refusing to stare at the tiny muddied footprints mixed with a dead man’s still paved in the street.

He’s yelling for him before he even reaches the courtyard, “Quackity!”

And even though he wasn’t even standing on the small porch he could still hear the chaos that followed his name. Someone gasped and then there was a loud clang of empty pots and pans. It was quickly followed by a long string of some rather colorful words from Quackity in his mother tongue.

“Roier! Por favor hazte cargo por el resto de la tarde. Lo sé, lo sé, guárdatelo! Te lo compensaré!” Quackity shouted and just *hearing him*—Wilbur paused.

Would he be angry? Would he regret the kiss? What if he was mad about Charlie being put in danger? So many stomach-churning thoughts threatened to turn his stomach completely when the door swung open and Quackity stumbled out red in the face, breathless, and *hopeful*. His calloused and lightly burned hands clung to the banister to stop him from falling face-first into the ground.

“*Wilbur*?” Quackity’s voice cracked as he stared at him from the porch.

He blanked and for once in his life, no other snarky quip or teasing comment dared cross his mind. The only sound that left him was a shuttered breath as his voice broke, “*Quackity*...”

He had been terrified that that last mournful wail Quackity let out as he was dragged away by Chaos would be the last sound he’d ever hear from him. He was the luckiest man on Earth to have been wrong. For once perhaps the gods had blessed him in finally getting a chance to love Quackity the way he deserved. He started by taking a tentative step forward toward the dark-haired man. “Hey, birdie.”

Quackity’s facade of strength shattered and in an instant, he was falling into Wilbur’s arms. Quackity’s hands linked around his neck and Wilbur crushed him to his chest. He clumsily spun him around in his arms while sobbing out a sigh of relief into his collar. Quackity scrambled for an even tighter purchase as his feet left the ground but without complaint. In fact, the only sound Wilbur could hear was Quackity muttering out gratitudes and curses over and over again to the sky.

He was alive. They were both alive and Wilbur had thought he’d never be able to hold the man he loved like this. Quackity’s feet came to rest atop his and Wilbur tucked his face into his shoulder, chuckling slightly when he felt Quackity rip off his beanie and chuck it far off so he could weave a hand into his curls. Quackity growled into his neck, “I hate you. I hate you so fucking much. Never fucking do that again. God, I hate you.”

Wilbur let out a breathless laugh and nodded. “I’m sorry, my darling. It won’t happen again.”

Quackity shook in his arms as he repeated tearfully, “I hate you. I hate you, you insufferable bastard. I hate you.”

“I love you,” Wilbur replied, as easy as breathing. “I love you *so much* and I’m sorry it took me so fucking long to tell you something so obvious. I love you. I’m *in* love with you and I will be in love with you till the day the stars fall from the sky and even longer.”

Quackity’s hand trailed down to tightly grip his shirt for a moment, trying to ground himself. The man pulled away slightly just so he could hold Wilbur’s face in his hands. His brown eyes were wide and determined as he demanded, “Ask me. Ask me again.”

Wilbur didn’t hesitate. “Quackity, can I kiss yo—“

Quackity didn’t even let him finish his question before he pulled him down to close the gap between them. Wilbur’s lips met Quackity’s in a searing kiss that burned away every last trace of that stupid wretched line forever. Every thought in his mind was wiped away and replaced with just *Quackity* as Wilbur grinned against his mouth before pushing himself impossibly closer. And then it was just them. Locked in each other’s embrace and thoroughly consumed by the other.

Quackity’s hands slid down to grip his collar tightly while Wilbur wound his fingers into dark hair. And as the anxiety that had sat in his chest since he left him faded, their kiss morphed from one of desperation and relief to something soft and gentle. Fireworks and butterflies and all of that first-kiss nonsense he’d heard about flooded through his veins and oozed out of his pores.

He’d kissed people before, but it had never felt anything like this. Nothing had ever felt as wonderful as this. Wilbur never wanted to leave and if he had his way, by the gods he never would.

“I feel like I should warn you now...” Quackity murmured against his teeth and Wilbur hummed as he pressed his lips against the corner of his mouth, his cheeks, and jawline before tilting his head back up to begin again. “I’m not going to want to do anything other than this for who knows how long.”

Wilbur giggled high-pitched and breathless and then leaned down to kiss his temple. “Oh, poor me. How will I ever survive?”

“I love you,” Quackity admitted suddenly, punching it out of his chest like it had been stuck in his throat for years. His voice lilted with slight wariness but it was sincere nonetheless. It nearly gave Wilbur a damn heart attack. He surged up to press his lips to his again before Wilbur could respond.

Even now, he was still cautious with his heart. Wilbur understood, of course. For Quackity to give away his heart... Wilbur could only hope he was worthy to carry it. To protect and cherish it with all he had. Quackity nosed his cheek before biting his own lip, nervous. Then he growled, "You're a fucking idiot though."

"You're so hot when you insult me," Wilbur teased and Quackity smacked his chest. Wilbur simply pulled him back in for another eternity. But eventually, he remembered he did promise his father and brothers to come meet them when he was done. So reluctantly, Wilbur pulled away to breathe and rested his forehead against Quackity's with a stupidly happy grin before pulling him into a tight hug once more.

"I thought I...that you—*shit*." Quackity bit his tongue hard but the sentence didn't need finishing. Wilbur had thought the same. He tucked his face back into the juncture of his neck and nodded.

"I'm sorry. I—" Wilbur began and Quackity shook his head harshly.

"He didn't give you a choice. That wasn't a choice. None of that was a fucking choice, okay?" Quackity declared. "None of it."

"I know. I just..." Wilbur paused, remembering the knife that had been pressed against his throat. He shuttered and pulled Quackity closer. "I'm sorry you and Charlie got dragged into it."

"You are one of the smartest men I know, so *infuriatingly* clever, and yet you somehow manage to be so fucking *clueless*." Quackity shook his head again and dragged him down again. Wilbur wasn't ashamed to admit he lost track of time a bit after that, promise or not. He was in the middle of catching his breath when he heard Quackity murmur dangerously in his ear. "Well...now that we've gotten that out of the way."

Oh, that tone means I'm fucked.

Quackity pulled back and grabbed him by the jaw. He hissed, "Live for me?! Fuckin' '*Live for me, Quackity*'?! *What the fuck is wrong with you?!*"

Wilbur broke into nervous laughter and defended himself, "What am I, if not a tragic romantic?"

“You’re a fuckin’ dead man is what you are—”

“Wilbur!” A child-like voice called out and Wilbur pulled away to turn around to his caller. Relief and joy melted into one as Charlie appeared in the doorway, his wide green eyes already beginning to water. He stumbled towards him.

“Charlie!” Wilbur effortlessly caught the boy in his arms and hoisted him up to hug him tightly. He kept his tone cheerful and comfortable though he felt dizzy with relief, “Sorry I missed our ride, I got a bit sidetracked.”

Charlie tucked his face into his shoulder and Quackity’s hand came up to rub his back as the boy shook. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry for the crossbow, for sneaking out and not listening to you. I told him you liked Quackity when he asked, it’s my fault—“

Wilbur shook his head fiercely and Quackity assured him, “It wasn’t your fault. None of it.”

“Quackity’s right. Even if you told him about Q and I, it’s not like it wasn’t obvious to anyone with eyes. He used you because you are a kid. Gods, *it was not your fault*,” Wilbur promised, shifting him in one arm so Quackity could coax him from his shoulder. He wiped away his tears while Wilbur continued, “Quackity and I were quite the troublemakers as kids. Who do you think loosened that board up in the first place? I should’ve known to have it nailed back years ago when you came around.”

Charlie looked like he would need a lot more convincing till he would believe that. Wilbur didn’t mind, they had all the time in the world now to convince him.

“Is Tommy okay?” Charlie whimpered out the question.

“He’s perfectly fine. Tommy told me to tell you that himself,” Wilbur promised and the boy only curled further into his shoulder. Quackity frowned and pulled off his newly repaired glasses to wipe away the wetness blurring them. Wilbur gently patted his back and tried to cheer him up, “It’s over now, okay? That man...He’s not coming back. *Ever*.”

He felt Quackity shudder at his side, not missing the implication the way Charlie did. After a time, Charlie pulled back to wipe away his tears and then squinted in confusion as he saw Wilbur. Wilbur winced, already knowing what Charlie was noticing. He had wanted to have this conversation with Quackity first, but since when did Wilbur ever get what he wanted? Then he remembered the people he was holding in his arms and realized that time was *now*, apparently. Not to mention Tommy.

So he waited patiently for the panic.

The boy's hand came up to brush against the new strands of white in his hair and Wilbur had never regretted telling the kid that story more as Charlie asked, "Why is there more?"

Quackity's eyes widened in horror and his jaw dropped as he realized what Charlie meant. Wilbur would've grabbed Charlie's hand if he hadn't been holding the two in his arms. He shook his head instead. "It doesn't matter now. All that matters is that I'm here and I'm not going *anywhere*."

"You have to promise," Charlie said with all the seriousness an eight-year-old could muster.

"I promise," Wilbur agreed instantly, already knowing the drill and briefly letting go of Quackity to hold out his pinkie and link theirs together. His hand was back around Quackity the moment Charlie pulled back. He felt Quackity's arm around him squeeze him slightly.

With that, they settled in a brief silence and Wilbur knew he couldn't stall any long. "I do unfortunately have to go. My family is waiting for me in the gardens. Tommy was insistent that he had to show me something."

Quackity's face fell, it was just a micro expression but Wilbur had known the man long enough to tell that he did *not* want to let him go. Charlie was much more obvious in his protests.

And fuck it, Wilbur didn't want to let go either. So he wouldn't. "Come with me. Charlie should see Tommy anyway and my father won't mind."

Quackity jolted at that. "I'm sure that's private, Wil. We shouldn't—"

“I don’t *care*,” Wilbur jumped in, “I want you with me. Always. I almost—I’m not fucking this up any more than I already have. I know what I want and you’ve always been part of our family.”

Quackity’s composure shook at that and he swallowed thickly. After a moment he nodded and slowly pulled away so he could link their hands together. He nodded. “Ok. Together then.”

“Breathe, Q.” Wilbur thumbed his shoulder, unsure of what about being up here made him so nervous. He hadn’t been when Tommy was in the Infirmary, no he’d been more collective and assertive than he’d ever seen.

“You first,” Quackity countered. Wilbur snorted and opened the door, not expecting Charlie to dart out before he’d even cracked it halfway.

“Ah! Charlie! Wait, don’t just—” Wilbur began as the boy bolted ahead, sprinting with the speed of a devil, and tackled Tommy to the ground. Tommy screeched but Wilbur barely heard the joy and chaos and inevitable tears of their reunion as he was now glued to the stone tiles beneath his feet staring ahead at the figure at his twin’s side.

All he could feel was Quackity’s hand entwined in his own and he’s pretty sure it’s the only thing keeping him tethered to the Earth currently. It had to be. At the very least, Quackity was what kept him from running, technically something he swore never to do again but what the actual fuck—? *Squeeze. Squeeze. A pause. Squeeze. A name. His own, probably.*

If Q was trying to cut off the circulation to his hand now he was doing a fantastic job. Or was he the one clutching onto him so tight that Quackity could only hold on just as so?

I think I’m about to have a panic attack.

And then there was his mother, who decidedly took pity and came to him instead. Quackity brought up their entwined hands and pressed a swift kiss of ‘*good fucking luck, man*’ to his knuckles before respectfully granting the two their space.

Oh, you bastard, Q. You absolute traitorous gorgeous bastard.

Because now that meant Wilbur was on his own, untethered and *reeling*.

Wilbur took a shaky step back mainly out of shock as she slowly neared him like he was a scared animal, which he supposed was not too far off. Wilbur swallowed thickly. His mother looked the same, if only smaller given he was now quite a bit taller than her. A choked sound meant to be her name came up and Wilbur inhaled sharply when his mother finally stood face-to-face with him for the first time in a decade.

It wasn't fair for him to still be angry. For him to still feel that sickening hurt in his chest every time he saw a painting or statue of her. It wasn't fair but dammit he *wanted* to be. Like a petulant child. *You left us*. Wilbur wanted to scream. *You left me*.

No, that's not true. She had been Crow. She had come to him and Techno's defense when they'd first met Tommy. She led us to him. She's the reason Tommy's still alive. She kept him alive.

He wanted to scream at *her*. He also wanted to hug her too.

Her hands hovered over his cheeks and she smiled soft and carefully at him.

"Hello, Wilbur."

He couldn't help it. His traitorous eyes watered immediately and he couldn't meet her gaze. He couldn't possibly handle this. Then her thumbs moved to brush away his tears and she slightly adjusted the glasses sliding down the bridge of his nose back into place.

"I was supposed to be mad at you," Wilbur whispered, pulling back slightly from her hands as they burned. He flinched at the way his mother's face fell at his words, a deep mask of guilt settled onto her expression, seeping deep into her bones. She opened her mouth to speak but then Wilbur gently grabbed her wrists still hovering over his face. He pushed his cheek into her palm and sighed, "I'm *supposed* to—"

“You’re allowed to be angry, sweetheart,” Kristin stopped him and Wilbur held his breath, probably looking as vulnerable as the child she’d last seen him had. “It wasn’t fair for you or Techno. I’m so sorry, Wil.”

And like that, eleven years of anger and betrayal disintegrated in his fists. Was that truly all he had needed?

He looked down at his mother and the answer right now was...yes. It didn’t fix everything, of course, he wasn’t naive by any means but he was more than willing to let her back in any way. It honestly had never mattered whether he was mad or not, he always would’ve let her back in because he never thought he’d actually get the chance to. Wilbur didn’t cry, he didn’t make a sound as he let himself curl into his mother’s arms. He rested his head against her shoulder and let her wrap him up tight like she had so long ago.

Wilbur collapsed into her further and the two knelt on the grass. Wilbur’s grasp on Kristin only tightened as he finally let himself breathe. He gasped hard into her shoulder and his eyes were wide and disbelieving until he felt her gently rub the back of his neck, threading her fingers through his dyed curls that still matched hers, even now. He felt someone tuck himself beneath his arm and instantly pulled who he knew was Tommy into the hug. Behind him, he heard the distinct sound of Techno being shoved forward followed by the sound of Phil and Techno’s bickering as they joined in. Phil chuckled and Wilbur felt another hand ruffle his hair like he was a child once more. His father settled at his side and his hand only slid down slightly to cover his mother’s.

Wilbur was still staring widely past his mother’s shoulder, shaking slightly now. He was overwhelmed, it was too much. He had everything back and it was too much joy for him to process. He felt his mother’s hand still and then slide out from beneath Phil’s. She reached out past him and her voice rang out softly as she asked, “Quackity, dear. Come here, will you? You as well, little one.”

“Charlie!” he stated loudly and Kristin chuckled.

“Of course. You as well, Charlie,” she replied and the child nodded, satisfied before he clamored into Tommy’s side again, eliciting laughter from the teen. He felt Charlie’s hand clutch his trenchcoat and exhaled slowly.

“As long as Techno doesn’t stab me, of course, Your Majesty. It is nice to see you again, ma’am,” Quackity squeaked slightly before his voice quickly grew more confident.

“Eh, later. You caught me in a good mood," Techno rumbled humorously.

“You have those?” Quackity countered.

There was a beat of silence and then his twin asked, “Wil, would you be—“

There’s a smack and Techno hissed. Wilbur snapped back without anger, “Yes, I'd be mad if you stabbed him.”

A grunt. “Lame.”

Wilbur could feel his heart start to settle, the jittery feeling all over him disappearing. Kristin reached out her hand again and this time Quackity let himself be pulled into the hug, a bit sharper than expected as he crashed slightly into Wilbur’s side.

Quackity’s arms looped around his waist and the swirling ball of ‘*too much*’ faded away. Wilbur breathed and the knot that had been tightly furled in his chest for the past decade finally began to unravel.

How long they stayed curled up together, Tommy couldn’t say, didn’t really care to be honest. How could he when this right here was all he’d ever wanted? All he’d ever dreamed?

His mother leaned into his father’s side now and the two laughed at something Techno said, eyes shining with only the occasional tear twinkling down their cheeks. Quackity and Wilbur were currently bickering over something silly that in a few minutes, they’d be laughing over with flushed cheeks. Though Tommy had clocked pretty quickly that something was different with them now. Techno had noticed *instantly*, much to Wilbur’s dismay and Kristin’s delight. Phil was simply unsurprised but happy nonetheless. Tommy was just happy that Wilbur was here. That *he* was still here.

Eventually, Tubbo and Ranboo made an appearance with Schlatt in tow. Tubbo had screeched and happily hugged Kristin while Schlatt had looked a little startled at first before he gave the barest hint of a smile. He had then proceeded to scold all three princes for being reckless and then begrudgingly admitted he was pleased that they were okay. After that, Ranboo had introduced themselves politely and Kristin had stood and told them how much they looked like their mother before she'd been cursed by the End.

There was a slight moment of panic when the Endling burst into tears and Tubbo ran up to smack his scarf into their face before the water could burn their cheeks.

Kristin apologized for overwhelming them, but Ranboo just thanked her. Tommy could feel a strange wave of guilt from her and decided he'd ask for the whole story one day if Ranboo was okay with it.

He had the time. And he'd repeat that fact over and over in every way he could.

Not long after when things settled once more, his mother pulled him over. She pulled him tight to her chest when he'd asked her to and didn't let go when he'd asked her that as well.

"The whole time?" Tommy asked after a while and Kristin tucked strands of white behind his ears. She nodded.

"It took me some time, there was a strange barrier spell up those first few years while everyone searched. It was why your father couldn't find you. It had to be someone with magic to cross. It took me two years to find you but it was always me, Tommy. Always," Kristin promised.

"What did they do to you? Why didn't Wil and I see you when we—?"

Hands held Tommy still and her voice grew serious, "You don't need to worry about that. I'm perfectly alright. I'm quite resilient. As are you."

Tommy shook his head. "I'm not. My Phoenix shit is the only reason I'm still here. He overpowered me so *easily*."

“Oh, but Wilbur told me about how you *fought*. You fought like hell as long as you could against someone who had every advantage against you. I’m so proud of you,” she said, unfamiliar brown eyes staring back that he could still tell were his mother’s all the same. “I want you to believe that for once. For me.”

And he did. Effortlessly.

When the sun began to dip below the horizon and slowly they began filing inside one by one. A wobbly smile tugged at his lips at his parents holding hands so tight their knuckles were white. He saw Wilbur in a similar scenario with Quackity, hands entwined and practically hip to hip. Techno had his arm slung over Tommy’s shoulders, warming him as the chill began to nip at his bones.

He paused only to stretch out his limbs, a bit stiff from sitting so. He felt his bones crack and Techno laughed and said he could see little flashes of gold around his joints whenever one cracked. Tommy popped one of his knuckles and giggled when he saw a little spark of gold highlight a sliver of one of the many bones in his hand.

Before he could wave over Tubbo to show him the new trick the world decided to give him one final surprise.

Tommy jolted in surprise when he felt something in his spine *move*. Something small and new and familiar stretched and the hand Techno had rested on his back jumped.

Techno’s head whipped around and both boys stared at each other with contrasting eyes wide in disbelief. And then Tommy smiled at his older brother and it outshone the sun.

The sky didn’t feel so unreachable anymore.

Chapter End Notes

what did yall seriously think he wouldn't get them back? pfff

the AO3 curse held strong through the end bc I was in the ER yesterday LMAO (dw I'm fine)

I hope you guys found this ending to be super satisfying or at least as much as possible. I definitely tried to give them the happiest end I could because they deserve it. This fic is

definitely my love letter to the SBI fandom and for the many years of joy (and pain) that it caused me. So thank you Tommyinnit, Technoblade, Philza, and Mumza for everything<3 And thank you to the Dream SMP fandom for being the hellscape that you were. I learned a lot from you (some of which I wish I could forget)

I hope you guys still stick around for my future works but this will be my last DSMP fic so I understand if not. (yo but if you fw jayvik stick around I gotchu)

I'll see you all for the epilogue after work on Monday<3

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

I highly recommend putting on Flying by Cody Fry for this one lads :) Trust me.

Lets give one final FINAL round of applause and love to my wonderful beta reader @arbitersart and a shout-out to my dear @theiatime. Seriously, TGP would've never been finished if it weren't for the both of you<33

TW: Mild Dissociation

Word Count: 2.5k

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's beautiful. The wind carries him high through the air as his red feathers leave a trail of fire in his wake. Tommy stretches his arm out, letting his fingers disturb the peace of the clouds he flies through their mist.

He swirls through the sky effortlessly now, having practiced with Ran till they both damn near fell from the sky and his father had to come to get them down. Even with the revelation that his wings had been returned to him, it took him a long time to swallow his fear that he might fall. His family had been more than encouraging and patient with him. As they always were, as they always would be.

But now Tommy braves the sky like it's second nature, like he'd been made for the sky all along.

Down on the ground below, Charlie chases two children around Quackity and Wilbur's feet. One is a girl with brilliant curls, brown eyes, and the musical genius of her adoptive father. Running at her side is her twin, a child whose red bow is dangerously close to flying from their hair and whose laughter is practically infectious. Wilbur's hand is curled around Quackity's waist while Quackity tilts his head against Wilbur's shoulder. The sun glints off two golden rings.

Not too far off, a boy, a few years older with dark hair with pink streaks that needed to be redone swings a wooden sword at Techno. He adjusts the skull mask on his face and continues happily sparring with his mentor, his *hero*. A curse still curls around Techno's arm, waiting for the day The Blood God claimed his end of the bargain. Whatever it was that he wanted. But everyday the answer seemed less of, "What does he want?" and more of, "Who does he want?"

There is a worry in his brother's very posture, seeped into his bones that had never been there before. It had only grown since he'd begun mentoring Chayanne, who is so much like him. Tommy knows one day the answer will come.

Tubbo is settled onto the ground, adjusting one of the hinges in Wilbur's elytra before it snapped one of these days mid-flight. His horns have started to curl around his ear and his brown hair is tied back while he tinkers away on another project. Every now and again he'll look up to the sky at his best friends and thank the gods that he doesn't have wings. Tubbo has always been perfectly content on the ground.

Tommy feels his wings start to drag against the wind causing him to adjust quickly. He tilts them down enough till the wind begins to glide with him. Tommy grinned internally at the smooth and seamless correction that he'd practiced over and over again for weeks until he'd perfected it.

"Toms!" A voice calls from below and Tommy looks down under him to see Ranboo waving him down. Their large shimmering dragon wings that spread wide across the sky were surely a sight now that they were patched up. Not by Tommy, but by Tubbo's sheer brilliance and Tommy's ever-radiant enthusiasm. Tommy feels the hair tie he'd been using to hold up his long blonde and white curls fall out of place when he curves himself higher into the clouds. While he has his wings back, his magic has been reduced largely to party tricks and healing small cuts and scrapes. So basically anytime Tallulah or Tilin decided to MMA each other or Chayanne? They came to Tommy.

He hopes that maybe over time his power might one day return to him, but he also knows he can live with it if it doesn't. He doesn't need it. Sarah had been right. It had been a gift and nothing more. He isn't worthless without it. In fact, Tommy is so loved that when it had finally been announced that both the youngest prince and their Empress had returned the entire empire had exploded into celebration like never before. The party in L'manburg alone had lasted an entire week and Wilbur had been hilariously drunk for most of it.

When it ended, Tommy settled into the new (old?) role as a prince with the amount of grace one would expect from Tommy. Which was none...but no one seemed to mind much. The terrifying pressure that he had been dreading since learning he was Theseus never came. No one ever pushed him to be better or to try harder. They loved him through every setback and trial he faced and eventually somewhere in the middle of it all...Tommy grew up.

He had grown into his role and into the man he was never supposed to be but had defied fate to become anyway. He was never supposed to live past sixteen and yet here he is.

Yes. Tommy is loved, so much so that sometimes he doesn't know how to process all of it, which leads to a growing frustration mostly aimed at himself. Those are the days he usually found himself in the sky. Tommy dives, as fast and reckless as he normally is, much to everyone's horror, but especially to Ranboo who warns, "*Careful!* Phil's—"

He'd apologize later but Tommy felt particularly like being a shit today so he salutes the other prince and grins. "Sorry, man, 'afraid the wind is too loud!" With that, he dives down towards the ground below in a ball of fire and adrenaline. His wings curl around him until the sheer speed he's going puts out the flames constantly licking at his wings. Tommy whoops loudly and stares into the clouds. The orange sky is beautiful and the wind is cold and exhilarating in his lungs. He probably should stop testing this but he is so *close* to a sick save he'd been attempting for a few days now. It's stupid and *extremely* reckless. Not to mention dangerous. It's—

"Theseus!" *Oops. Too low.*

Someone strong slams into him, hoisting him up and arching them back into the sky. Tommy gasps loudly in shock and tucks in his wings as quickly as he can before the wind catches them and sends them spiraling. It doesn't hurt anymore doing this. He has his wings out so often, sometimes it was a relief to put them away for a while, even if at first it had been panic-inducing.

"*What did I tell you?!*" Phil hisses in his ear while Tommy latches on further, burying his wind-chilled nose into his father's shoulder. He probably deserves this. In truth, it has been a long time coming. "What have I told you so many times not to do!?"

"Not to divebomb?" Tommy says meekly. Phil adjusts his hold until he's certain Tommy's *still* scrawny ass doesn't slide out of his arms. His giant wings dwarf Tommy's by quite a lot and hail above them as Phil turns them back toward the castle.

"Do you think I tell you that for shits and giggles? Gods, Tommy, you scared the shit out of me!" his father scolds. "Just because you can do that doesn't mean you should!"

"Didn't you used to do that?" Tommy asked and Phil paused for one second too long. *Gotcha.*

"...That's not important," Phil gritted out before finally softening slightly, the fear of him crashing into the icy lake below slowly ebbing out of his system. "*You* shouldn't be doing it regardless. Also, I was *immortal* then."

“And I’m extremely durable,” Tommy counters and hisses when Phil reaches up to flick the back of his head. “*Oi—*”

“You are *not* extremely durable. You are just extremely good at putting yourself back together which I don’t think applies if you flatten yourself against an iced-over lake,” Phil argues.

Tommy huffs grumpily “That’s a technicality. ”

“*Theseus—*”

“Sorry,” Tommy caves and tucks his head further into his father's shoulder in a brilliant move of parental manipulation. Phil begins to slowly spiral downwards with a grace that came with years, *centuries*, of practice. He lands on the soft grass and Tommy mumbles out, “I’m sorry, Dad.”

“No, you’re not,” Phil sighs. “ *You* are a smug little shit with a death wish.”

Damn. He is still a shit liar, even now. Phil lands close to the training grounds by the garden and Tommy eagerly unhooks himself from Phil’s arms. His father catches him by his forearm and Tommy grins, “Was I ever anything else?”

The warmth in his father’s eyes tells him he’s forgiven. He’d always be forgiven, just as he always would be loved. Phil had to reach slightly up now to ruffle his hair but it was just the same as it had been before he shot up in height. His father smiled at him and said, “I’m telling your mother.”

Uh oh.

“Do not tell Mum. Do not! Don’t!” Tommy yelped and grabbed onto Phil’s arm, trying to stop him uselessly as he began to stride towards the greenhouse where Kristin was hard at work. He might be taller but his father was far stronger than him. “Dad, wait! Dad, please! Please, please, please— The ‘I’m not mad, just disappointed’ look *alone* will kill me. It’s hell enough coming from you!”

“You should’ve thought of that before you tried to make a dive like that.”

He’s about to say something super witty and clever in response when a wave of fog slams into him. His grip slackens while his father’s tightens.

Once upon a time, the thought of someone being mad at Tommy was terrifying. Because that someone would have always been *Dream*. His terrible anger and cruelty were a memory he couldn’t banish if he tried. And he’d tried. But that was years ago now and it has been much easier since then. He still has nightmares that have him waking up screaming. He still hates when anyone touches his neck and the slits on his back. He doesn’t really like people touching his wings in general, not unless he trusts them and they ask first.

His mind also drifts a lot. Especially in the beginning when his memories were the most sporadic and taxing to remember. When the memories he’d see were broken into fragments, nonsensical and painful jagged pieces of his history trying to fit back into his mind. Even now, he still has moments where he’ll be thrown into his head to remember, but nowadays the things he sees are whole and familiar. Even the bad ones.

It had been agreed early on that whatever had been in that tea he’d loathed for so many years was decidedly to blame. He must’ve spaced out then because he jumps when he feels a hand press warmly against his cheek. He sluggishly blinks back to the present to see his father’s face strained with worry. Phil’s eyes widen when he sees the clarity in Tommy’s eyes again and he asks him calmly, “Tommy? Tommy, where did you go?”

Tommy sways slightly, looking around and not really remembering getting to the Greenhouse but not questioning it.

“Look at me, son,” Phil grabs his attention quickly before he can space out again. “Hm? Sorry—I lost myself there.” Tommy’s head spins slightly.

Phil brushes his thumb over his cheek and frowns, looking rather guilty. “Yeah, you sure did, mate. It’s been a few minutes. That’s the longest I’ve seen in a while. Did I—?”

Tommy immediately stops him before they can trail down *that* particular rabbit hole again. “No, no. I think it was just a random one. It wasn’t really a memory at all, I just...spaced I guess.”

“Did he wake up yet? I brought some oh—!” His mother appears from around the corner with some peppermint herbs clenched shakily in her fist. She rushes over, unconsciously letting the peppermint fly from her hands so she can fret over her youngest. Her dark curly hair trails behind her in a long braid Tommy guesses either Tallulah or Wilbur did. (The slight dishevelment has Tommy leaning toward Lullah) His mother frowns when Tommy's eyes glaze over briefly. “Are you alright? You were gone so long. What was it?”

“I’m fine, really. It was nothing specific and nothing really new either,” Tommy assures her, leaning down and letting her press a kiss against his forehead. “I’m okay, Mum. No harm done.”

His mother’s hair tickles his cheeks but Tommy can tell she isn’t any less worried than before. Tommy grabs her hand. “I’m okay. I was just a little riskier today in the sky and I guess it startled me after all.”

And by the way her eyes immediately narrow, Tommy knows he's *screwed*. “You were more than that. You were *reckless*. I scolded your father more than a few times for trying to smash into things long before you were born, even when we were immortal. You are flesh and bone even with your powers. *No more diving like that, Theseus.*”

Her hand squeezes his tight and Tommy decided whatever trick shot he’d been trying to make was not worth upsetting his mum over. He did however glare at Phil for being a fucking *snitch*.

Tommy relents easily regardless, he's given his parents more than enough gray hairs. “No more divebombs, Mum. I promise.”

“Oh, did Tommy almost smack into the ground again?” A voice calls out as they enter the Greenhouse. He doesn’t have to look to know who it is and he can already tell his brother is grinning. “How close were you this time?”

“*Do not* encourage him, Wil,” Phil chastises, thwacking the back of his head. “Gods above.”

“So *that’s* what the kid saw. And here I thought Chayanne had lost it,” Techno snorts while Wilbur slings an arm around Tommy’s shoulders. Techno picks a stray twig from Tommy’s hair and asks, “Did you hit anything on the way down?”

“Techno,” Kristin warns with that same look in her eye that all three siblings *and Phil* knew not to fuck with. Immediately Techno raises his hands in surrender.

“I hit Dad.” Tommy shrugs. “Does that count?”

“I’m pretty sure *Dad* hit *you* if what Ranboo said was true. You owe them an apology by the way,” Wilbur adds. He sees Phil chuckle slightly at that as he wraps an arm around his wife, she leans into him on instinct.

Tommy nods at that. “Oh yeah, I’m sure they shit their pants seeing that.”

Techno claps a hand on his shoulder from behind (something that no longer makes him jump) and conveys lowly, “As cool as it was...you do that again I’m removing the black keys off your piano.”

He sees Wilbur nod in agreement and immediately realizes no one has his back on this one. So instead he threatens, “I’ll steal the strings from both of your instruments and toss them in that lake I almost crashed into.”

Wilbur’s eyes narrow. “You wouldn’t.”

“Try me. We have the rest of our lives to find out.” Tommy grins and regardless of whether or not Techno made good on his promise to desecrate his piano, he was happy. His dream had come true after all.

And maybe one day, long after Theseus has lived out his happily ever after, somewhere at the end of the world in a dried-out lake, a boy with short blonde hair, stormy eyes, and a red and white shirt will find a rusted piano wire, a violin string, and a guitar string braided together. And when he runs to show his family the strange finding, they all agree.

It’s familiar.



Chapter End Notes

*All that I know now is sky and cloud
Don't know when my feet last touched the ground
You said if I believed enough, I would fly*

Well...that's it I guess. Thank you for reading The Golden Phoenix and for all the support and love you have given me for this work these past three years. I hope you stick around for future stuff even if its not in the same fandom but if not I wish you well. I hope this was the ending you were hoping for and that it lived up to the expectations. It was a hell of a ride and its cool to look back and see how much I've grown up since Ch.1 (and how much healthier and happier I am since then).

Thank you for reading my silly little tangled fic, lovelies. I'll see you in the next world-building nightmare I create next. <3
-Emi

End Notes

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed!!! They mean so much to me and I read every single one.

If you liked this chapter, consider joining my discord for updates and fanart. Also, you can send me stuff there!

<https://discord.gg/hDRDTW8QjY>

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I'm also on Twitter, Tumblr, Tiktok with the handle @emiartse ;)

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